Robert

JOHN F. AUTRY

THE PREACHER'S
COMPLETE HOMILETIC
COMMENTARY
ON THE
BOOK OF GENESIS

THE PREACHER'S COMPLETE HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE

OLD TESTAMENT

ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN

WITH CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES,
INDEXES, ETC., ETC.

By VARIOUS AUTHORS

In Twenty-One Volumes

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
NEW YORK AND LONDON

A HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE BOOK OF

GENESIS

CHAPTERS I. to VIII.

BY THE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS.

PAGE

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER I.

VERSES

CRITICAL NOTES 3
1—2 The Creator and His Work 4
The Theology of Creation 5
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 6
3—5 The Creation of Light 9
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 10
6—8 The Atmosphere 14
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 15
9—13 The Sea and the Dry Land 16
Vegetation 17
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 18
14—19 The Heavenly Bodies 19
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 20
20—23 Fish and Fowl 21
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 22
24—26 The Animal World 23
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 24
21—28 The Creation of Man 25
What is the Image of God in which Man was Created ? ... 26
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 27
29—31 The Universe—God's Gift to Man 27
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 28
Suggestive Illustrations for Chapter I.... 28

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL NOTES 39
1—3 The Divine Sabbath 39
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 40
4—7 The World without a Man 41
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 41
8—17 The Garden of Eden 43
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 44
18—25 The Creation of Woman... 45
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 46
Illustrations to Chapter II. 49

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES 53
1—7 The First Great Temptation 54
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 56

VERSES		PAGE
8—12	The Sad Effects of Yielding to Temptation	62
13—21	The General Results of the Fall of our First Parents	65
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	67
22—24	The Expulsion of Man from Eden	70
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	71
	Illustrations to Chapter III.	71

CHAPTER IV.

VERSES		PAGE
	Critical Notes	78
1, 2	Domestic Life	78
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	80
3—8	The True and False Worshipper of God	81
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	82
9—16	The Bitter Curse which Sin brings upon an Individual Life	85
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	88
16—18	The Future of a God-forsaken Life	89
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	90
19—26	Lamech	90
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	91
	Illustrations to Chapter IV.	92

CHAPTER V.

VERSES		PAGE
	Critical Notes	96
1—32	Distinguished Men	96
	The Longevity of the Antediluvian Race	99
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	99
	Illustrations to Chapter V.	103

CHAPTER VI.

VERSES		PAGE
	Critical Notes	105
1—8	A Degenerate World	105
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	109
	Extent of Man's Wickedness	111
	Lonely Moral Goodness	112
9—13	Noah, or a Good Man Living in Degenerate Times	113
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	114
14—22	The Divinely-Achieved Safety of the Good, and its Connection with the Life-Giving Agencies of the Material Universe	115
	The Ark, a Type of the Scheme of Human Salvation	118
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	122
	Illustrations to Chapter VI.	125

CHAPTER VII.

VERSES		PAGE
	Critical Notes	130
1—10	The Ark Completed; or, the Termination of definite Moral Service	131
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	133
11—24	The Deluge; or, the Judgments of God upon the Sin of Man	137
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	139
	Illustrations to Chapter VII.	142

CHAPTER VIII.

VERSES PAGE
CRITICAL NOTES 146
1—5 The Gradual Cessation of Divine Retribution 146
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 148
6—12 The Judicious Conduct of a Good Man in seeking to ascertain the Facts of Life, and his Relation thereto 150
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 152
13—19 Man's Going Forth after the Judgments of God 153
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 154
20—22 The Devout Conduct of a Good Man, after a Special Deliverance from Eminent Danger 155
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 157
Illustrations to Chapter VIII. 158

CHAPTER IX.

CRITICAL NOTES 161
1—7 The Divine Benediction on the New Humanity 162
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 167
8—17 God's Covenant with the New Humanity 170
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 174
18, 19 The Factors of Human Culture 178
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 181
20—27 The Lessons of Noah's Fall 182
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 184
28, 29 The Years of Noah: their Solemn Lessons 188
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 189

CHAPTER X.

CRITICAL NOTES 189
1—32 The First Ethnological Table 190
Suggestive Comments on the Chapter 192
Suggestive Comments on Special Portions 192
Illustrations to Chapter IX. 193
Illustrations to Chapter X. 200

CHAPTER XI.

CRITICAL NOTES 205
1—9 The Builders of Babel 206
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 209
10—26 The Generations of Shem 214
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 215
27—32 The Dawn of Abram's History 215
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 216
Illustrations to Chapter XI. 218

CHAPTER XII.

CRITICAL NOTES 223
1—3 The Call of Abraham 225
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 229
4—9 Abraham on his Journey.—The Obedience of Faith 232

VERSES PAGE
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 235
10—20 Abram in Egypt. The Temptations and Trials of a Life of Faith 238
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 241

CHAPTER XIII.

Critical Notes 247
1—4 The Believer Learning from his Great Enemy... 247
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 250
Abram's Journey to the Place of the Altar 252
5—9 Strife between Brethren... 253
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 256
10—13 A Worldly Choice 259
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 260
14—18 The Saint's Comfort in Solitude 263
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 266
Illustrations to Chapter XII. 270
Illustrations to Chapter XIII. 275

CHAPTER XIV.

Critical Notes 280
1—12 The First War on Record 281
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 283
13—16 Abram as a Warrior 286
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 288
17—20 The True Priest for Mankind 290
Melchizedek a Type of Christ 292
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 294
21—24 The Believer's Superiority to the World 296
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 297
Illustrations to Chapter XIV. 299

CHAPTER XV.

Critical Notes 306
1—6 The Rationale of Faith in God 307
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 310
7—21 The Confirmation of Faith 316
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 320

CHAPTER XVI.

Critical Notes 323
1—3 Forestalling God's Appointed Time 324
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 326
4—6 The Evils of Abolishing Social Distinctions 328
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 330
7—12 Providence and the Outcast 333
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 335
13—14 The Retrospect of a Special Providence 338
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 339
15, 16 The Conviction of a Special Providence :— Practical Effects 341
Suggestive Comments on the Verses 341

CHAPTER XVII.

VERSES PAGE
Critical Notes ... 342
1, 2 Preparation for Fresh Spiritual Privileges ... 344
Walking before God ... 344
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 346
3—8 The Second Stage of the Covenant ... 348
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 350
9—14 The Covenant Seal ... 356
Circumcision and Christian Baptism ... 358
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 358
15—22 The Clearer Revelation of the Covenant Blessings ... 361
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 364
23—27 Obedience to the Divine Voice ... 369
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 370

CHAPTER XVIII.

Critical Notes ... 371
1—8 The Duty of Hospitality ... 372
A Prelude to the Incarnation ... 374
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 375
9—15 The Conflict between Fear and Faith ... 380
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 382
16—19 The Secret of the Lord with Abraham ... 385
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 386
19 Family Religion ... 387
20—22 God's Judgment on Nations ... 389
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 390
23—33 Intercesssory Prayer ... 391
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 394

CHAPTER XIX.

Critical Notes ... 398
1—3 The Eve of Judgment to the Righteous ... 399
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 400
4—11 The Eve of Judgments to Sinners ... 401
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 402
12—22 The Deliverance of the Righteous in the Time of Judgment 406
18—22 The Infirmities of the Heirs of Salvation ... 412
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 413
23—25 The Destruction of the Cities of the Plain ... 416
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 417
The Fate of Lot's Wife ... 419
The Cause and Danger of Backsliding ... 419
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 420
27—29 The Righteous Man's Retrospect of God's Great Judgments 422
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 423
30 The Folly of Seeking Our Own Choice ... 426
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 426
31—38 The Lessons of Lot's Dishonour ... 427
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 428

CHAPTER XX.

VERSES PAGE
Critical Notes ... 429
1—7 Abraham's Repetition of His Old Fault: the Power of Former Temptations ... 430
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 432
8—16 Morality Outside the Church ... 435
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 436
17, 18 An Efficacious Intercessory Prayer ... 440
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 440

CHAPTER XXI.

Critical Notes ... 441
1—5 The Birth of Isaac ... 442
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 444
6—17 The Rejoicing at Isaac's Birth ... 446
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 447
8—13 The Expulsion of Ishmael ... 448
The Destinies of Ishmael ... 450
The Allegory of Isaac and Ishmael ... 450
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 452
14—21 Hagar and Ishmael in the Wilderness: The Sorrows of the Outcasts ... 454
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 455
22—32 Abraham, the Friend of Man ... 457
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 458
33, 34 Abraham, the Godly Man ... 460
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 461

CHAPTER XXII.

Critical Notes ... 461
1—18 The Trial of Abraham's Faith ... 462
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 465

CHAPTER XXIII.

Critical Notes ... 473
1, 2 Abraham in the House of Mourning ... 474
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 475
3—20 Abraham Burying his Dead ... 477
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 479

CHAPTER XXIV.

Critical Notes ... 484
1—9 Abraham's Provision for the Marriage of his Son ... 485
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 486
10—14 The Embassy of Abraham's Servant ... 490
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 492
15—31 The Finger of Providence in the Appointment of a Bride for Isaac... ... 494
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 495
32—49 The Marriage Treaty ... 499
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 500

VERSES		PAGE
50—60	The Success of the Marriage Treaty	502
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	502
61—67	A Primeval Marriage	506
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	507

CHAPTER XXV.

	Critical Notes	509
1—6	The Last Years of Abraham	510
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	511
7—11	The Death and Burial of Abraham	513
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	514
	The Life and Character of Abraham	517
	The First Period	518
	The Second Period	521
12—18	The Generations of Ishmael	525
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	526
19—23	The Religious Character of Isaac	526
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	527
24—28	Birth of Esau and Jacob	529
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	530
29—34	The Sale of the Birthright	532
	Esau's Contempt of his Birthright improved	533
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	535

CHAPTER XXVI.

	Critical Notes	539
1—5	The Covenant Renewed to Isaac	540
	The Famine	541
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	542
6—11	Isaac's False Expedient	544
	Isaac's Falsehood	544
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	545
12—33	The Prosperity of Isaac	546
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	547
34, 35	Esau's Marriage	549
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	550

CHAPTER XXVII.

	Critical Notes	550
1—5	Isaac in the near Prospect of Death	551
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	552
6—10	Rebekah's Cunning Plot in favour of Jacob	553
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	554
11—24	Rebekah's Cunning Plot Accepted and Carried Out by Jacob	554
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	555
25—29	Isaac Blessing Jacob	558
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	559
30—40	Esau's Disappointment of his Blessing	560
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	560
41—46	Esau's Resentment	563
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses	564
	Important Reflections Suggested by the Foregoing Narrative	565

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VERSES PAGE
CRITICAL NOTES ... 566
1—5 The Beginning of Jacob's Pilgrimage ... 567
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 568
6—9 Esau, the Type of Worldliness and Hypocrisy ... 569
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 570
10—22 Jacob's Vision ... 570
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 572

CHAPTER XXIX.

CRITICAL NOTES ... 577
1—14 Jacob's Experience on his Journey ... 577
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 578
15—20 Jacob's Lowly Estate ... 579
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 580
21—28 Laban's Fraud on Jacob ... 581
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 582
29—35 Leah and Rachel; their Trials and Compensations ... 583
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 583

CHAPTER XXX.

CRITICAL NOTES ... 583
1—13 Rachel's Impatience ... 584
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 585
14—21 Two Types of Religious Character ... 586
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 586
22—24 God's Favour towards Rachel ... 586
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 587
25—43 Jacob's New Contract of Service ... 587
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 588

CHAPTER XXXI.

CRITICAL NOTES ... 590
1—21 Jacob's Departure for Canaan ... 590
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 591
22—42 Laban's Expostulation with Jacob and Jacob's Defence ... 594
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 595
43—55 Laban's Covenant with Jacob ... 596
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 598

CHAPTER XXXII.

CRITICAL NOTES ... 599
1, 2 Jacob's Visible and Invisible World ... 600
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 601
3—23 Jacob's Preparation for Meeting his Angry Brother ... 601
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 602
24—32 Jacob Wrestling with the Angel ... 604
The Features of the Development of Revealed Faith in Jacob's Wrestling ... 605
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 605

CHAPTER XXXIII.

VERSES PAGE
CRITICAL NOTES ... 608
1—16 The Reconciliation of Jacob and Esau ... 609
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 609
17—20 Jacob's Faith and Piety... ... 611
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 611

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CRITICAL NOTES ... 612
1—6 Dinah's Dishonour ... 612
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 612
6—31 The Punishment of Dinah's Dishonour... 614
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 614

CHAPTER XXXV.

CRITICAL NOTES ... 616
1—15 Jacob's Second Journey to Bethel ... 616
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 618
16—20 The Death of Rachel ... 619
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 620
21—26 Jacob's Twelve Sons ... 621
27—29 The Death and Burial of Isaac ... 621
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 622

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CRITICAL NOTES ... 622
1—43 The History of the Generations of Esau ... 623
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 624

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CRITICAL NOTES ... 624
1—17 The Commencement of Joseph's History ... 625
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 626
18—28 The Conspiracy to Murder Joseph ... 627
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 628
29—36 Jacob's Grief for his Son ... 630
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 631

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CRITICAL NOTES ... 632
1—30 The Character of Judah... 632
The Lessons of Judah's History... 633
8—10 The Sin of Onan... ... 634
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 634

CHAPTER XXXIX.

VERSES		PAGE
	CRITICAL NOTES ...	635
1—6	The Prosperity of Joseph in the House of his First Master ...	636
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	637
7—12	The Temptation of Joseph ...	638
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	639
13—18	The False Charge against Joseph ...	640
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	641
19—23	Joseph in Prison... ...	642
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	642

CHAPTER XL.

	CRITICAL NOTES ...	643
1—23	Light upon Joseph's Destiny ...	644
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	645

CHAPTER XLI.

	CRITICAL NOTES ...	649
1—8	Pharaoh's Dream ...	650
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	651
9—16	Joseph Summoned into Pharaoh's Presence ...	651
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	653
17—32	Joseph as a Prophet ...	654
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	654
33—36	Joseph as the Adviser of Pharaoh ...	655
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	656
37—45	Pharaoh Accepts Joseph's Advice ...	656
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	657
46—52	Joseph Advanced to Power and Place ...	658
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	659
53—57	The Seven Years of Famine ...	660
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	661

CHAPTER XLII.

	CRITICAL NOTES ...	662
1, 2	The Famine in the House of Jacob ...	662
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	663
3—20	The First Journey of Jacob's Brethren into Egypt ...	663
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	664
21—24	The Memory of Conscience ...	666
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	667
25—28	The Miseries of an Awakened Conscience ...	668
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	669
28—38	The Increasing Troubles of Jacob's Old Age ...	669
	Suggestive Comments on the Verses ...	671

CHAPTER XLIII.

VERSES PAGE
CRITICAL NOTES ... 672
1—14 Jacob under the Pressure of Want ... 672
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 673
15—18 Joseph's Brethren Under the Influence of a Guilty Fear ... 675
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 675
19—25 Joseph's Steward... ... 676
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 677
26—34 Joseph and his Brethren at the Banquet ... 678
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 679

CHAPTER XLIV.

CRITICAL NOTES ... 680
1—15 The Final Trial of Joseph's Brethren ... 681
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 682
16—34 Judah's Intercession ... 684
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 685

CHAPTER XLV.

CRITICAL NOTES ... 686
1—15 Joseph made Known to his Brethren ... 688
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 688
16—20 Pharaoh's Invitation to Jacob and his Sons ... 691
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 691
21—24 Joseph Equips his Brethren for their Journey... ... 692
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 693
25—28 The Joyful News told to Jacob... ... 694
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 695

CHAPTER XLVI.

CRITICAL NOTES ... 695
1—7 The Migration of Jacob's House to Egypt ... 696
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 697
8—27 The Catalogue of the Children of Israel ... 698
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 699
28—34 The Settlement of the Children of Israel in Goshen ... 699
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 700

CHAPTER XLVII.

CRITICAL NOTES ... 701
1—12 Joseph Introduces Jacob and his Family to Pharaoh... ... 701
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 702
13—26 Joseph's Administration in Egypt ... 704
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 705
27, 28 The Children of Israel in Goshen ... 706
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 706
29—31 Israel's Preparation for Death ... 707
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 707

CHAPTER XLVIII

VERSES PAGE
Critical Notes ... 708
1—7 Jacob's Adoption of Israel's two Sons ... 708
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 709
8—20 The Blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh ... 710
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 710
21, 22 Jacob in the Prospect of Death... ... 712
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 713

CHAPTER XLIX.

Critical Notes ... 713
1, 2 Jacob as a Prophet of the Lord... ... 714
3, 4 The Blessing of Reuben... ... 716
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 716
5—7 The Blessing of Simeon and Levi ... 716
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 717
8—12 The Blessing of Judah ... 717
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 719
13—21, 27 The Blessings of Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali and Benjamin ... 720
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 721
22—26 The Blessing of Joseph ... 721
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 723
28—33 The Dying Jacob ... 723
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 724

CHAPTER L.

Critical Notes ... 724
1—13 The Honour Paid to the Departed Jacob ... 725
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 726
14—21 Joseph's Last Forgiveness of his Brethren ... 726
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 728
22—26 Dying Joseph ... 728
Suggestive Comments on the Verses ... 729

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

GENESIS.

Introduction.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS.

THE Book of Genesis is probably the most important contained in the Bible; it forms the basis of all revelation; is necessary to account for the moral condition of man, and his consequent need of redemption by Christ. The history, doctrine, and prophecy of all the inspired writings take their rise in its narrative, and without it would be unintelligible to us.

The Book has an HISTORICAL importance. It informs us of the creation of the world—of the coming forth of man to inhabit it, and of his development into a family, a tribe, a nation. It also contains the record of many great and influential lives, and presents them with the pictorial vividness, with the simplicity and pathos of primitive times. The great historical divisions of the Book are—1. The introduction, from chap. i. 1 to chap. ii. 3. 2. "The generations of the heavens and the earth," beginning with chap. ii. 4, and extending on through the history of the fall to the birth of Seth, chap. iv. 3. "The book of the generations of Adam," from chap. v. to vi. 8. 4. "The generations of Noah," giving the history of Noah's family till his death, from chap. vi. 9 to chap. ix. 5. "The generations of the sons of Noah," giving an account of the over-spreading of the earth, chap. x. 1 to chap. xi. 9. 6. "The generations of Shem," the line of the promised seed, down to Abram, Nahor, and Haran, the sons of Terah, chap. xi. 10 to 26. 7. "The generations of Terah," the father of Abraham, from whom also in the female line the family was traced through Sarah and Rebekah, chap. xi. 27 to xxv. 11. 8. "The generations of Ishmael," from xxv. 12 to 18. 9. "The generations of Isaac," containing the history of him and his family from the death of his father to his own death, xxv. 19 to end of xxxv. 10. "The generations of Esau," xxxvi. 1–8. 11. "The generations of Esau in Mount Seir," xxxvi. 9 to xxxvii. 1. 12. "The generations of Jacob," xxxvii. 2 to end of chapter.

Thus the Book of Genesis contains the history of the world's early progress, as presented in the lives of the most influential men of the times. It is, therefore, most important, certainly most interesting, and supremely reliable, as the outcome of a Divine inspiration then for the first time given to man. The Book has a DOCTRINAL importance. It narrates the creation of man, with his temporal and moral surroundings. It teaches the Divine origin of the soul; that life is a probation; that communion with God is a reality; that man is gifted with moral freedom; that he is subject to Satanic influence, and that a violation of the law of God is the source of all human woe Here we have the only reliable account of the introduction of sin into the world; the true philosophy of temptation, the true meaning of the redemptive purpose of God, the universal depravity of the early race; and we have exemplified the over-ruling providence of God in the history of the good. The Book has an ETHICAL importance. It teaches the holy observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest and prayer; the intention and sanctity of marriage; and in its varied characters the retribution of deceit and envy. The morals of the book are most elevating, and are especially emphatic in their appeal to the young. Nor are these principles contained merely in cold precept, but are invested with all the force and reality of actual life. Hence they are rendered pre-eminently human, attractive, and admonitory. The book has a POLITICAL importance. It traces the growth of social and national life; it indicates the method of commerce during the ancient times; it also proves that the national life of men may be rendered subservient to Divine ideas, and be made the medium for the advent of spiritual good to humanity.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS.

There can be little doubt but that the Book of Genesis was written by Moses, as were the other Books of the Pentateuch. The author of Exodus must have been the author of Genesis, as the former history is a continuation of the latter, and evidently manifests the same spirit and intention. The use of Egyptian words, and the minute acquaintance with Egyptian life and manners displayed in the history of Joseph, harmonize with the education and experience of Moses; and, although the evidence in favour of the Mosaic origin of Genesis is necessarily less full and direct than that for the subsequent books, yet, considering its possession of the linguistic peculiarities common to the whole five, its bearing upon the progressive development of the Jewish history, and the testimony borne to it in the New Testament, it comes to us as the authentic work of an author who wrote as he was inspired by the Holy Ghost.

THE SOURCES FROM WHICH THE AUTHOR OF GENESIS GATHERED HIS INFORMATION.

We are aware that the Inspired Penmen used their best native efforts in the attainment of facts, and in the method of their narration. They did not indolently rely on the aid of the Holy Ghost to make known to them events which were within their own power to ascertain. Hence, in writing the Book of Genesis, Moses would avail himself of all possible help that could be obtained from human sources. It is possible that the account of the Creation may have been derived by tradition from Adam, who, we may suppose, would be Divinely informed as to the method of his own existence, and of the world around him. This may have been the case; but it is quite as probable that the process of Creation was revealed to Moses, as doctrines in after times were made known to the inspired writers, and written by them under the direct instruction of God. On this supposition only can we account for the plain, minute, and yet majestic revelation of this important week of Divine work. That Moses was aided by authentic documents—by family genealogies—by tradition, and very likely, by the narratives of eye-witnesses—is probable. This help would be most welcome to him. And certainly, in the use of these varied materials, he has shown a master-hand in weaving them all into such a beautiful and harmonious plan, and in bringing out from them things of secondary importance, so many hints of the great redemptive truths to be more fully disclosed in subsequent ages.

THE STANDPOINT FROM WHICH THE BOOK OF GENESIS SHOULD BE READ.

The Book of Genesis should not be exclusively studied from a scientific point of view The object of the writer was not to present the world with a geological, botanical, or astronomical account of its different strata, of its varied plants, and of the ever-changing heavens,—but to make known the fact of the Creation as appropriate at the commencement of a Divine revelation to man, and as supplying a need that otherwise could not be met. Thus he writes from the standpoint of an ordinary observer of things, and to men, irrespective of their education. and makes known to them the power, wisdom, and goodness of God in fitting up the home in which the human family was to reside. Thus the book of Genesis is a history, and not a treatise on any scientific question—or on the philosophy of human existence; but it is emphatically a narrative, authentic and most instructive to mankind. And, although a few critics of the Materialistic school may venture to impugn its veracity, the unfoldings of time, and the outworkings of science, are their constant refutation.

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. In the beginning]** Or, "at first," "originally," "to start with:" Sept. en *archê* (εν αρχῃ) as in John i. 1. **God]** Heb. *'Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים): w. ref. to this frequent and interesting Divine Name, note (1.) its *radical conception*—that of POWER; (2.) its *form*—PLURAL either "of excellence" (Ges. and others), or "of abstraction," as in "lordship" for "lord" in English (B. Davies); (3.) its *construction*—gen. w. SING. VERB. AND PRONOUN, as here w. *bârâ* (בָּרָא), *he created*,—serving as an ever recurring protest against the wild vulgarity wh. wd. here understand "angels," and as a plea for the unity of the Divine Nature. *Elohim* = "the Putter-forth of manifold powers, or the Living Personification of power in its most radical conception," occurs about 2,500 times in O. T. **2. And the earth]** Here "the e." is emp. by position (Ewald); and, as emphasis implies contrast, shd. be introduced by "but:" "But THE EARTH!"—a strangely overlooked hint for the expositor—"But THE EARTH had become," &c.,—whether by first creation or subseq. catastrophe, *it does not say.* **Without form and void]** Heb. *thóhu* and *bhóhu:* words inimitably expressive = "wasteness and emptiness." *B* occurs only thrice, each time with *T.*: here, and Is. xxxiv. 11: Jer. iv. 23. **Deep]** Heb *thehôm* = "roaring deep:" Sept. and Vulg. *abyss.* **Moved]** Heb. participle expresses the continued process of life-giving love. **3. And God said]** Better (because of the strong *waw*, and position of verb): "Then said God" = "the state of things being as just described." From this point the drama is unfolded to the eye. **Light]** The orig. is indeed inimitable: *Yehi 'ôr, wa-yehi 'ôr.* The nearest approach in Eng. is perh: "Exist, light!—then exists light." **4. Good]** Also: "fair," "fine," "beautiful;" Sept. *Kalon.* **5. And the e. and the m. were]** A dull rendering. The Heb. marks *sequence*, with some latitude of application, "And so"—or—"And then it became e.... became m. one day." **6. Firmament]** Or: "expanse;" prop. "something beaten out," "expanded." **11. Kind]** Prop. "form" or "shape," hence "species," "kind." Comp. 1 Cor. xv. 38, where note the aorist tense = "as it (originally) pleased him:"—a hint on "the perpetuity of species." **14. Lights]** "Luminaries:" Heb. *me'ôrôth*, sing. *mâ'ôr*, not *'ôr* as in ver. 3: Sept. *phôstêr* here, *phôs* there. There was "light" before the fourth day **20. Creature]** Here, and in vv. 21, 24, "creature" stands for Heb. *nephesh* (Sept. *psyché*). and in v. 30 "wherein is life" is, more exactly, "wherein is a *nephesh* of life." If our Eng. "soul" cannot be expanded so as to cover the biblical usage of *nephesh* and *psyché*, the next best thing might be to *adopt* "psyche," "psychical," at least in private and expository discourse. According to 1 Cor. xv., Adam was a "psychical" man, and this death-doomed body is a "psychical" body. Cf. C. N. on ch. ii. 7. **21. Whales]** Heb. *tannin*: prop. a long creature (Ges. Dav.) wh. winds or twists itself, or stretches itself along (Furst). The use of this word in O.T. is remarkable: only in Job. vii. 12 is it elsewhere in O. V. rendered "whale:" in Ex. vii. 9, 10 12, it is "serpent;" in Deut. xxxii. 33, Neh. ii. 18, Ps. lxxiv. 13, xci. 13, cxlviii. 7, Is. xxvii. 1 li. 9, Jer. li. 34, "dragon;" and in Lam. iv. 3, "sea-monster." These are all its occurrences **26.** Man] Heb. *'âdhâm* (Adam). The reader of the Heb. can scarcely resist the impression that a close connection was meant to be seen between *'âdhâm* "man," and *,adhâmâh* "earth," "ground." Guided by this, and by 1 Cor. xv. 47, we cannot doubt that "earth-born" (Kalisch) rather than "red," "ruddy" (Ges. "perh") gives the rad. conception of the word. Dominion] The orig., *radhah*, signifies to lay low, overthrow, tread down; hence subdue, rule. **28.** Replenish] Simply "fill," therefore, supporting no inference that the earth had previously been filled, and was afterwards emptied, wh. may or may not have been the case.

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MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 1—2.

THE CREATOR AND HIS WORK.

I. Then Atheism is a folly. "In the beginning God." There have always been men who have denied the existence of God. All down through the ages their voices have been heard—their books have been read, and their arguments have been promulgated. Atheism is the supreme folly of which man is capable. It divests life of all spiritual enjoyment—of real nobility of character, and degrades almost to the level of the brute. The atheist must be blind to all the appearances of Creation, for one sincere outlook upon them would demonstrate the mockery of his creed. The fool hath said in his heart that there is no God. He dare not loudly articulate a conclusion, which his inner consciousness tells him to be so utterly devoid of truth, so criminal, and so likely to attract the retribution of heaven. Atheism is proved absurd:—1. *By the history of the creation of the world.* It would be impossible for a narrative to be clearer, more simple, or more divinely authenticated than this of the creation. The very existence of things around us is indisputable evidence of its reality. If this history be a myth, then the world and man must be myths also. But if the universe is a fact, then it follows that this ancient narrative must be so. Then this chapter is perfectly natural in its subject matter. We should have antecedently expected that the first word of a Divine revelation would be of the Being of God, and that it would also acquaint us with the history of creation. Here, then, we have a cause adequate to the effect, for admitting an Omnipotent Being, there is no difficulty in the creation of the universe. A man who would reject the plain statement of this Book, to be consistent, would have to reject all history. True, we may imagine the pen of man as incompetent and unequal to record the creative fiat and energy of God. It would be difficult for him to spell the words, to mark the punctuation, to catch the accents of the Divine language. And who has not felt that the first verse of this chapter, trembles and is almost broken by the majesty and weight of the thought and revelation that resides within it. But this is no argument against the historical veracity of the writer, but rather the contrary, in that thoughts so sublime were ever conceived by the human mind, and crowded into the broken syllables of men. 2. *By the existence of the beautiful world around us.* The world standing up around us in all its grandeur—adaptation—evidence of design—harmony—is a most emphatic assertion of the Being of God. Every flower is a denial of Atheism. Every star is vocal with Deity. And when we get away from the merely visible creation into the inner recess and quietude of Nature, where are seen the great sights, and are heard the mysterious voices, when permitted entrance to the spiritual meaning of the things we see, we acknowledge ourselves to be brought into undeniable communion with the supernatural, and are ready there and then to worship at its altar. 3. *By the moral convictions of humanity.* There is probably not an intelligent man in the wide universe, who does not believe in, and pay homage to, some deity or other. The temples of the heathen filled with idols, are a permanent demonstration of this. Man's conscience will have a god of some kind. That there is a deity is the solemn conviction of the world. Hence the folly of Atheism. II. Then Pantheism is an absurdity. We are informed by these verses that the world was a creation, and not a spontaneous, or natural emanation from a mysterious something only known in the vocabulary of a sceptical philosophy. Thus the world must have had a personal Creator, distinct and separate from itself. True, the Divine Being is present throughout the universe, but He is nevertheless independent of, and distinct from, it. He is the Deity of the Temple. He is the King of the realm. He is the Occupant of the house. III. Then matter is not eternal. "In the beginning." Thus it is evident that matter had a commencement. It was created by Divine power. It had a birthday. We wonder that any number of intelligent men should have credited the eternity of matter. The statement involves a contradiction in terms. How could matter be eternal? It could not have produced or developed itself from some generic form, for who created the generic form? The world must have had a commencement. The Mosaic record says it had. This is the only reasonable supposition. IV. Then the world was not the result of a fortuitous combination of atoms. "In the beginning God created." Thus the world was a creation. There was the exercise of supreme intelligence. There was the exercise of an independent will. There was the expression in symbol of great thoughts, and also of Divine sympathies. There is nothing like chance throughout the whole work recorded in this chapter. If atoms were originally gifted with such intelligence and foresight as to combine themselves instinctively into such beautiful forms, and wonderful uses, as seen in the world, how are we to account for their degeneracy, as at present they appear utterly devoid of any such power. How is it that we are not the spectators of a little spontaneous creation now, similar to that of the olden days? V. Then creation is the outcome of supernatural power. "In the beginning God created." There must of necessity ever be much of mystery connected with this subject. Man was not present to witness the creation, and God has only given us a brief and dogmatic account of it. God is mystery. The world is a mystery. How very limited then must be the knowledge of man in reference thereto? Science may vaunt its discoveries, but the mystery of creation is open more to the prayerful reader of this record, than to the philosopher who only studies it for the purpose of curious inquiry. But there is far less mystery in the Mosaic account of the creation than in any other, as it is the most natural, the most likely, and truly the most scientific, as it gives us an adequate cause for the effect. The re-creation of the soul is the best explanation of the creation of the universe, and in fact of all the other mysteries of God.

THE THEOLOGY OF CREATION.

Man naturally asks for some account of the world in which he lives. Was the world always in existence? If not, how did it begin to be? Did the sun make itself? These are not presumptuous questions. We have a right to ask them—the right which arises from our intelligence. The steam engine did not make itself, did the sun? In the text we find an answer to all our questions. I. The answer is simple. There is no attempt at learned analysis or elaborate exposition. A child may understand the answer. It is direct, positive, complete. Could it have been more simple? Try any other form of words, and see if a purer simplicity be possible. Observe the value of simplicity when regarded as bearing upon the grandest events. The question is not who made a *house*, but who made a *world*, and not who made one world, but who made all worlds; and to this question the answer is, God made them. There is great risk in returning a *simple* answer to a *profound* inquiry, because when simplicity is not the last result of knowledge, it is mere imbecility. II The answer is sublime. *God!* God *created!* 1. Sublime because far-reaching in point of time: in the *beginning*. Science would have attempted a fact, religion has given a *truth*. If any inquirer can fix a *date*, he is not forbidden to do so. Dates are for children 2. Sublime because connecting the *material* with the *spiritual*. There is, then, something more than dust in the universe. Every atom bears a superscription. It is something, surely, to have the name of God associated with all things great and small that are around us. Nature thus becomes a materialized *thought*. The wind is the breath of God. The thunder is a note from the music of his speech. 3. Sublime, because revealing, as nothing else could have done, the power and wisdom of the Most High. III. The answer is sufficient. It might have been both simple and sublime, and yet not have reached the point of adequacy. Draw a straight line, and you may describe it as simple, yet who would think of calling it sublime? We must have simplicity which reaches the point of sublimity, and sublimity which sufficiently covers every demand of the case. The sufficiency of the answer is manifest: Time is a drop of eternity; nature is the handiwork of God; matter is the creation of mind; God is over all, blessed for evermore. This is enough. In proportion as we exclude God from the operation, we increase difficulty. Atheism never simplifies. Negation works in darkness. The answer of the text to the problem of creation is simple, sublime, and sufficient, in relation. (1) *To the inductions of Geology*. (2) *To the theory of evolution*. Practical inferences:—1, If God created all things, then all things are under His goverment. 2. Then the earth may be studied religiously, 3. Then it is reasonable that He should take an interest in creation [*City Temple*].

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. I. A revelation of God. 1. *His Name*: names have meaning. 2. *His nature*: spirituality, personality. 3. *His mode of existence*: manifold unity.

II. A revelation of nature. 1. *Matter not eternal*. 2. *The antiquity of the earth*. 3. *The order of creation* [*Pulpit Analyst*].

Creation:—1. In what it consisted. 2. When undertaken. 3. By whom accomplished.

Creation:—1. Its commencement. 2. Its progress. 3. Its completion.

Creation:—1. As a history. 2. As a doctrine. 3. As a prophecy.

This history of creation:—1. Contains a rich treasury of speculative thought. 2. Capable of poetical glory. 3. Free from the influence of human invention and philosophy.

Our history of creation differs from all other cosmogonies as truth from fiction. Those of heathen nations are either hylozoistical, deducing the origin of life and living beings from some primeval matter; or pantheistical, regarding the whole world as emanating from a common divine substance; or mythological, tracing both gods and men to a chaos or world-egg. They do not even rise to the notion of a creation, much less to the knowledge of an Almighty God, as the Creator of all things [*Keil & Delitzsch*].

God:—1. Before all things. 2. The cause of all things. 3. The explanation of all things. 4. The destiny of all things.

In the beginning:—1. The birth of time. 2. The birth of matter. 3. The birth of revelation.

This verse assumes:—1. The Being of God. 2. His eternity. 3. His omnipotence. 4. His absolute freedom. 5. His infinite wisdom. 6. His essential goodness.

Admonitory lessons to be learned from the Divine creation of the world:—1. To admire it carefully. 2. To trust it cautiously. 3. To rely on God entirely.

The first circumstance which here offers itself to our consideration and observation, is the phrase and manner of speech which the Holy Ghost makes choice of, in this narrative, which we see, is as plain as it is brief, without any manner of insinuation, by way of preface, and without any garnishing by art, or eloquence, which men usually make use of, for the setting out, and gracing of their writings: the Spirit of God suddenly, as it were, darting out the truth which he delivers, like the sunbeams breaking in an instant as out of a cloud, as being a light visible, and beautiful in itself, and therefore needing no other ornament, or varnishing, to commend it to the world [*J. White*]

"The heavens and the earth":—Heaven is named first, as being first, if not in time, yet at least in dignity. 1. Let us make heaven our chief desire. 2. Learn from the heavens to stoop to these below us.

Heaven:—1. The sign of man's origin. 2. The direction of his prayer. 3. Inasmuch as the earth is contained in this narration, we must regard it as the work of God, and associate it with our thought of heaven.

We are all of us familiar with this idea, that in contemplating the works of creation, we should ascend from Nature to Nature's God. Everywhere we discern undoubted proofs of the unbounded wisdom, power, and goodness of the great Author of all things. Everywhere we meet with traces of just and benevolent design which should suggest to us the thought of the Almighty Creator. It is most pleasing and useful to cultivate such a habit as this; much of natural religion depends upon it, and Holy Scripture fully recognises its propriety: "The heavens declare the glory of God," &c.; "All Thy works praise Thee," &c. It is apparent, however, that even in these and similar passages, that created things are mentioned, not as arguments, but rather as illustrations; not as suggesting the idea of God the Creator, but as unfolding and expanding that idea, otherwise obtained. (Romans i. 20) [*Dr Candlish*].

Thus, in a spiritual view, and for spiritual purposes, the truth concerning God, as the Creator, must be received, not as a discovery of our own reason, following a train of thought, but as a direct communication from a real person—even from the living and present God. This is not a merely theoretical and artificial distinction; it is practically most important. Consider the subject of creation simply in the light of an argument of Natural Philosophy, and all is vague and dim abstraction. It may be close and cogent as a demonstration in Mathematics, but it is cold and unreal; or, if there be emotion at all, it is but the emotion of a fine taste and a sensibility for the grand and lovely in nature and thought. But consider the momentous fact in the light of a direct message from the Creator Himself to you—regard Him as standing near to you, and Himself telling you, personally and face to face, all that He did on that wondrous week—are you not differently impressed and affected?—1. More particularly,—see first of all, what weight this single idea, once truly and vividly realized, must add to all the other communications which He makes on other subjects to us. 2. Again, observe what weight this idea must have if we regard God Himself as personally present, and saying to us, in special reference to each of the things which He has made—"I created it, and I am now reminding you that it was I who made it." What sacredness will this thought stamp on every object in nature [*Dr. Candlish*].

In the first two chapters of Genesis we meet with four different verbs to express the creative work of God, viz.:—1. To create. 2. To make. 3. To form. 4. To build.

This narrative bears on the very face of it the indication that it was written by man and for man, for it divides all things into the heavens and the earth. Such a division evidently suits those only who are inhabitants of the earth. Accordingly, this sentence is the foundation-stone of the history, not of the universe at large, of the sun, of any other planet—but of the earth, and of man, its rational inhabitant. The primeval event which it records, in point of time, from the next event in such a history; as the earth may have existed myriads of ages, and undergone many vicissitudes in its condition, before it became the home of the human race. And, for aught we know, the history of other planets—even of the solar system—may yet be unwritten, because there has been as yet no rational inhabitant to compose or peruse the record. We have no intimation of the interval of time that elapsed between the beginning of things narrated in this prefatory sentence, and that state of things which is announced in the following verse [*Dr. Murphy*]

Taken along with the context, the drift of the whole verse seems to be to give, in a brief and compendious form, a summary of the work of creation, which is more fully detailed in its various particulars in the account of the six days following. Such general statements but unfrequently occur in the sacred writers as a preface to more expanded details that follow. Thus it is said, in general terms (Verse 27) that, "God created man in His own image, male and female created He them;" whereas the particulars of their crea-

tion are given at full length—Chap. ii. 7, 18, 25 [*Bush*].

The Eternal God hath given being to time.

The Almighty Creator hath made all things to be out of nothing.

The vast heavens and all therein are God's creatures.

THE TEACHING OF CHAOS.

Verse 2. I. **That the most elementary and rude conditions of things are not to be rejected or overlooked.** "And the earth was without form and void." 1. *This may be true of the world of matter.* The earth was at the time of this verse in a state of utter desolation. It was without order—it was without furniture. There was not a human being to gaze upon its chaos—there was not a voice to break its silence. There were no animals to roam amidst its disorder. There were no trees, or flowers to relieve its barrenness. The earth was desolate. 2. *This may be true of the world of mind.* There are many minds in the universe whose intellectual condition would be well and fitly described by the language of this verse. They are desolate. They are not peopled with great thoughts. They are not animated by great and noble convictions. They are destitute of knowledge. The intended furniture of the mind is absent. The cry "Let there be light" has not been heard within their souls. Darkness is upon the face of the deep. 3. *This may be true of the world of the soul.* How many souls are there in the universe—in the town—in the village—whose moral condition is well described by the language of this verse? Their soul life lacks architecture. God designed that it should be based on elevated principles, animated by lofty motives, and inspired by great hopes; but instead of this it is based on expediency, and is but too frequently animated by the delusion of the world. Their souls ought to be occupied with divine pursuits, whereas they are busy with the transient affairs of time; they ought to be filled with God, whereas they are satisfied with little rounds of pleasure; they ought to be enraptured with the visions of eternity, whereas they are spell bound by the little sights of time. Such a soul is in a state of chaos far more lamentable than that of the world at the Creation, inasmuch as the one is matter, and the other an immortality. But chaos is not irretrievable. It must not be despised.

II. **That the most rude and elementary conditions of things, under the culture of the Divine Spirit, are capable of the highest utility and beauty.** 1. *This is true of the material world.* The earth was without form and void: but now it is everywhere resplendent with all that is esteemed useful and beautiful. It opens up realms of knowledge to the scientific investigator. It discloses beauties that kindle the genius of the artist. It manifests a fertility most welcome to the husbandman. Whence this transition? Is it to be accounted for on the principle of development? Is it the result of atmospherical influences? Is it to be accounted for by the law of affinity or attraction? Is it attributable to the achievements of human effort? True, man placed the seed into the soil; he cultured it, but where did the *life* come from? That must have been a creation, and not an education. It was the gift of God. It was the result of the Spirit's hovering over the darkness of Nature. So it is the Divine agency, however many human instrumentalities may be employed, that makes the desolation and solitude of nature wave with fields of plenty, and echo to the joyful cry of the reaper. The world is under a Divine ministry. 2. *This is true of the world of mind.* The chaos of the human mind is turned into order, light, and intellectual completion, by the agency of the Divine Spirit. True, the man is naturally a student; he is diligent in the pursuit of information, and he has a fine opportunity for mental culture. But who has given him the power of intelligent inquiry, the disposition of diligent study, and the means of education? They are the gift of God. The avenues of the human mind are under the guardianship of the Spirit much more than we imagine, and all the noble visitants that enrich our intellectual life are largely sent by Him. The brooding of the Divine Spirit over the darkest human mind, and the voice of God sounding in its empty abyss will produce light, and, ultimately, the highest manifestation of thought. A noble education is the gift of God, and so are great ideas. A man may have much knowledge and yet great chaos: hence, God not only gives the life-principle to the mind, but also its harmonious development and growth to a complete and orderly mental world. 3. *This is true of the world of soul.* The chaos of the soul of man can only be restored by the creative ministry of the Holy Spirit. He will create light. He will restore order. He will cause all the nobler faculties of the soul to shine out with their intended splendour. He will make the soul a fit world for the habitation of all that is heavenly. This ministry of the Spirit should be more recognised by us. Despise not the chaos—the darkness. It may yet be turned into a world of glory—a realm of light, by the kindly hovering of the Divine Spirit.

The earth: — 1. Without form. 2. Without light. 3. Without life. 4. Not without God.

The Spirit of God:—1. Removes darkness. 2. Imparts beauty. 3. Gives life.

The Spirit of God:—1. Separating. 2. Quickening. 3. Preparing.

Without form and void:—1. A type of many souls. 2. A type of many lives. 3. A type of many books. 4. A type of many sermons. 5. A type of many societies.

All things are empty until God furnisheth them.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 3—5.

The Creation of Light.

I. Divinely produced. "And God said, Let there be light." 1. *For the protection of life.* The Divine Being is gradually preparing the infant world for the habitation of living things. Hence, prior to their creation, He beneficently makes everything ready for their advent. Plants could not live without light; without it, the flowers would soon wither. Even in a brief night they close their petals, and will only open them again at the gentle approach of the morning light. Nor could man survive in continued darkness. A sad depression would rest upon his soul. A weird monotony would come upon his life. He would long for the grave, and soon would his longings be at rest, as life under such conditions would be impossible, and certainly unbearable. 2. *For the enjoyment of life.* Even if man was permitted to live for a short space of time in a dark world, what practical use could he make of life, and what enjoyment could he have in it? He would not be able to pursue any commercial enterprise. He could not spend his time in study. He would not be able to read. He would not be able to write. For if darkness had remained upon the earth from its creation, an invention for the giving of light would have been impossible, nor would men have been favoured with the artificial advantages now possessed by the blind. It is light that makes the world so beautiful, and that enables the artist to perceive its grandeur, and reproduce it on his canvas. Light is one of God's best gifts to the world. (1.) *It is inexpensive.* The world has to pay for the light produced by man; that created by God, we get for nothing. Man has limitations; God has none. Man is selfish; God is beneficent. (2.) *It is extensive.* It floods the universe. It is the heritage of the poor equally with the rich; it enters the hut as well as the palace. (3.) *It is welcome.* The light of morning is welcome to the mariner, who has been tossed on the great deep through the dark and stormy night; to the weary sufferer, whose pain has rendered sleep impossible; and how often has the morning dawn over the distant hills awakened the rapture of poetic souls as they have been watching from an eminence the outgoings of the morning. 3. *For the instruction of life.* Light is not merely a protection. It is not only an enjoyment. It is also an instructor. It is an emblem. It is an emblem of God, it's Author, who is the Eternal Light. It is an emblem of truth. It is an emblem of goodness. It is an emblem of heaven. It is an emblem of beneficence. It is calculated to teach the world the most important lessons it can possibly learn. All the gifts of God are teachers as well as benefactors. He leads men through enjoyment into instruction. II. Divinely approved. "And God saw the light, that it was good." 1. *It was good in itself.* The light was pure. It was clear. It was not so fierce as to injure. It was not so weak as to be ineffectual. It was not so loud in its advent as to disturb. It was noiseless. It was abundant. There is a great force in light, and yet nothing is more gentle; hence it was as the offspring of Divine power. 2. *It was good because adapted to the purpose contemplated by it.* Nothing else could more efficiently have accomplished its purpose toward the life of man. Nothing else could have supplied its place in the universe. It is allied to religious ideas. It is allied to scientific investigation. It is allied to every practical subject of life. Hence it is good because adapted to its purpose, deep in its meaning, wide in its realm, nappy in its influence, and educational in its tendency. 3. *We see here that the Divine Being carefully scrutinises the work of his hands.* When He had created light, He saw that it was good. May we not learn a lesson here, to pause after our daily toil, to inspect and review its worth. Every act of life should be followed by contemplation. It is criminal folly to allow years to pass without inquiry into the moral quality of our work. He who makes a daily survey of his toil will be able to make a daily improvement, and secure the daily approval of his conscience. III. Divinely proportioned. "And God called the light day, and the darkness he called night." 1. *The light was indicative of day.* In this light man was to work. The light ever active would rebuke indolence. By this light man was to read. In this light man was to order his moral conduct. Through this light man was to walk to the eternal light. 2. *The removal of light was indicative of night.* In this night man was to rest from the excitement of pleasure, and the anxiety of toil. Its darkness was to make him feel the need of a Divine protection. Let no man seek to reverse the order of God's universe, by turning day into night, or night into day, if he does, a sure retribution will follow him. Some preachers say that they can study better at night. If they can, it is the result of habit, and not the natural outcome of their physical constitution. God evidently thinks that men can rest better at night, and work better in the day-time. Hence He puts out the great light, and bids the world repose under the care of Him who neither slumbereth or sleepeth.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse. 3. Light is the first of all creatures that God makes, as being itself most generally useful, especially to the end which God principally aimed at, which was to make all the rest of his works visible.

God loves to do all His works in the light. 1. He dwells in the light (1. Tim. vi. 16). 2. Because His works are perfect, and therefore, able to endure the light (John iii. 21). 3. In order that He may be seen in His works.

The study of God's work is:—1. Pleasant. 2. Profitable. 3. Necessary. Light is an emblem of God:—1. Glorious. 2. Pure. 3. Diffused in an instant. 4. Searching all places. 5. Useful for direction and comfort. How much more is God the author of wisdom, and understanding, the inward light of the soul.

There was nothing but deformity till God brought beauty into the world.

God often brings light out of darkness:—1. The light of day from the darkness of night. 2. The light of prosperity from the darkness of affliction. 3. The light of knowledge from the darkness of ignorance. 4. The light of peace from the darkness of strife.

Was light created before the creation of the sun, and other luminous bodies? That this is possible has been shown by Dr. McCaul, "Aids to Faith," p. 210; but very probably the creation of the sun is related in verse 1, where under the word heaven (or heavens), may be comprehended the whole visible universe of sun, moon, and stars. Now, the history is going on to the adaptation of the earth for man's abode. In verse 2, a thick darkness had enveloped it. In this 3rd verse the darkness is dispelled by the word of God, the light is separated from the darkness, and the regular succession of day and night is established. Still, probably, there remains a clouded atmosphere, or other obstacle to the full vision of sun and sky. It is not till the fourth day that their impediments are removed, and the sun appears to the earth as the great luminary of the day, the moon and the stars as ruling the night. Light may, perhaps, have been created before the sun. Yet the statement, that on the first day, not only was there light, but the succession of day and night, seems to prove that the creation of the sun was "in the beginning," though its visible manifestation in the firmament was not till the fourth day [*Speaker's Commentary*].

One or two facts may be mentioned, as confirming the more recent elucidation of this Scripture statement. Humboldt, in describing the beauty of the Zodiacal light, has said—"The Zodiacal light, which rises in a pyramidal form, and constantly contributes by its mild radiance to the external beauty of the tropical nights, is either a vast nebulous ring, rotating between the Earth and Mars, or, less probably, the exterior stratum of the solar atmosphere." "For the last three or four nights, between 10° and 14° of north latitude, the Zodiacal light has appeared with a magnificence which I have never before seen. Long narrow clouds, scattered over the lovely azure of the sky, appeared low down in the horizon, as if in front of a golden curtain, while bright varied tints played from time to time on the higher clouds; it seemed a second sunset. Towards that side of the heavens, the diffused light appeared almost equal to that of the moon in her first quarter." Not less striking is his description, in another passage, of a cloud well known to astronomers, passing over the heavens luminously and with great rapidity: "The light of the stars being thus utterly shut out, one might suppose that surrounding objects would become, if possible, more indistinct. But no: what was formerly invisible can now be clearly seen; not because of lights from the earth being reflected back by a cloud—for very often there are none,—but in virtue *of the light of the cloud itself*, which, however faint, is yet a similitude of the dazzling light of the sun. The existence of this illuminating power, though apparently in its debilitude, we discover also—by appearance, at least—among other orbs." While these facts prove the existence of light without the sun being visible, it may be urged that the light spoken of in Genesis not only made day and night, but it must have been sufficient to sustain life. To suppose that it was adequate to this end involves no violent hypothesis, for neither plant nor animal life is spoken of until there has been a separation of land and water. In the earlier and more recent geological ages the heat was doubtless greater than it is now; and this, taken in connection with a surrounding vapourous atmosphere, and with such light as existed, may have conduced to the development of whatever plant-forms then prevailed. Difficulty in entertaining this view has been greatly lessened by the fact, that not only plant, but animal life may be sustained under conditions of feeble light, great pressure, and intense heat, which were not long ago deemed incredible [*Dr. W. Fraser*].

In the beginning God *created* the heaven and the earth. But verse 16 reads, "God *made* two great lights." In the one, we have "*bara*," create;

in the other, asáh, He *made* or fashioned, or appointed, of materials or objects already created, or existent, the sun to be a light-bearer; and so also the moon, which is known not to have light either in itself or immediately surrounding it. The Creator adopted and employed for this purpose the sun and moon, and may have introduced, for the first time, such relations as now exist between them and our atmosphere. Adopting the latitude of interpretation, which is warranted by the use of the distinct terms, *bara* and *asáh*, we suggest another view. When, after the deluge, God "Set His bow in the cloud to be a token that the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy the earth," it is not necessarily an inference that the rainbow had never before appeared. As all the physical conditions, on which it depends had existed during man's history, it *may* have been visible; and, assuming that it was so, it only received a new historical connection when it was made a token of the covenant. In the same manner the sun and moon and stars may have been visible long before they were appointed to be "for signs and for seasons," and to fulfil a new historical relation to man, as they ever afterward rule his day and night [*Dr. W. Fraser*].

Verse 4. God's view of His works:—1. To rejoice in them. 2. To support them. 3. To direct them.

Let us review the works of God:—1. As a good employment for our minds. 2. As a comfort to our souls. 3. As increasing our love for Him. 4. As inspiring us with praise.

The work of God is good:—1. Because it must answer to the workman. 2. Because no one else can augment its perfection. 3. Because it is the vehicle of truth. 4. If it proves not so to us it is because we are out of harmony with it. 5. Let us try to imitate God in his method of works as far as possible.

Light is good:—1. Therefore thank God for it. 2. Therefore use it well. 3. Therefore strive to reflect it.

Light and darkness succeed each:—1. Each useful in its turn. 2. We should prepare for darkness. 3. We may anticipate heaven where there is no night.

Verse 5. All light is not day, nor all darkness night; but light and darkness alternating in a regular order constitute day and night [*Augustine*].

None but superficial thinkers can take offence at the idea of created things receiving names from God. The name of a thing is the expression of its nature. If the name be given by man, it fixes, in a word, the impression which it makes upon the human mind; but when given by God, it expresses the reality, what the thing is in God's creation, and the place assigned it there by the side of other things [*Keil & Delitzsch*].

In what sense is the word "day" to be understood in this narrative? To simplify the subject I make the single issue—is it a period of twenty-four hours, or a period of special character indefinitely long? The latter theory supposes the word to refer here not so much to *duration* as to *special character* — the sort of work done and the changes produced during the period contemplated. Turning our attention to this latter theory, we raise these inquiries· 1. *Do the laws of language and especially does the usage of the word "day" permit it?* Beyond all question the word "day" is used abundantly (and therefore admits of being used) to denote a period of special character, with no particular reference to its duration. We have a case in this immediate connection (Gen. ii. 4) where it is used of the whole creative period; "In the *day* that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens." (See 1 Thess. v. 2; 2 Peter iii. 12; 2 Cor. vi. 2; Eph. iv. 30; Joel ii. 2; Eccl. vii. 14.) To set aside this testimony from usage as being inapplicable to the present case, it has been said—i. That here is a succession of days, "first day," "second day," and that this requires the usual sense of days of the week. To which the answer is that here are six special periods succeeding each other—a sufficient reason for using the word in the peculiar sense of a period of special character. Each of these periods is distinct from any and all the rest in the character of the work wrought in it. The reason for dividing the creative work into six periods—"days," rather than into more or fewer, lies in the Divine wisdom as to the best proportion of days of man's labour to the one day of his rest, the Sabbath. ii. It will also be urged that each of these days is said to be made up of evening and of morning—"The evening and the morning were the first day." But the strength of this objection comes mainly from mis-translation. The precise thought is not that evening and morning composed or made up one full day; but rather this: There was evening and there was morning—day one, i.e., day number one. There was darkness, and there was light, indicating one of the great creative periods. It is one thing to say, There were alternations of evening and morning—i.e., dark scenes and bright scenes—marking the successive periods of creation, first, second, third; and another to affirm that each of these evenings and mornings *made up* a day. Let it be considered, moreover, that while in Hebrew, as in English, *night* and *day* are often used for the average twelve hours duration of darkness and of light respectively in each twenty-four hours, yet in neither language are the words *evening* and *morning* used in this sense, as synonymous both night and day. Indeed, "evening" and "morning" are rather points than periods of time; certainly do not indicate any definite amount of time—any precise number of hours; but are used to denote the two great changes—*i.e.*, from light to darkness, and from darkness to light; in other words, from day to night, and from night to day. Therefore, to make evening and morning, added together, constitute one day is entirely without warrant in either Hebrew or English usage, and cannot be the meaning of these passages in Genesis. 2. *Apart from the bearing of geological facts, are there points in the narrative itself which demand or even favour this sense of the word?* i. Throughout at least, the first three of these creative epochs, there was no sun-rising and setting to mark off the ordinary day. These, therefore, were not the common human day; but, as Augustine long ago said, these are the days of God—Divine days—measuring off His great creative periods. ii. In some, at least, of these creative epochs, the work done demands more than twenty-four hours. For example, the gathering of the waters from under the heavens into one place, to constitute the seas or oceans, and leave portions of the earth's surface dry land. Nothing short of absolute miracle could effect this in one human day. But miracle should not be assumed here, the rule of reason and the normal law of God's operations being never to work a miracle in a case where the ordinary course of nature will accomplish the same results equally well. We must the more surely exclude miracle, and assume the action of natural law only throughout these processes of the creative work, because the very purpose of a protracted, rather than an instantaneous creation, looked manifestly to the enlightenment and joy of those "morning stars," the "sons of God," who beheld the scene, then, "sang together and shouted for joy" (Job xxxviii. 7.) We may say moreover, in regard to each and all of these six creative periods, that if the holy angels were indeed spectators of these scenes, and if God adjusted His methods of creation to the pupils—these admiring students of His glorious work—then surely we must not think of His compressing them within the period of six human days. Divine days they certainly must have been, sufficiently protracted to afford finite minds scope for intelligent study, admiring contemplation, and as the Bible indicates, most rapturous shouts of joy. In this case, should geology make large demands for time far beyond the ordinary human day, we shall have no occasion to strain the laws of interpretation to bring the record into harmony with such demands [*Dr. Cowles*].

Arguments for the literal interpretation of the Mosaic day:—"It was evening, and it was morning, the first day," or, "evening came and morning came, one day," are terms which can never be made to comport with the theory of indefinite periods; and especially when there follows God's resting from His works, and hallowing the seventh day, as a day of sabbatical commemorative celebration of the work of the other six. Was that, too, an indefinite period [*Dr. Wardlaw*].

It is certain that in the fourth commandment, where the days of creation are referred to (Ex. xx. 9-11), the six days' labour and the sabbath spoken of in the ninth and tenth verses, are literal days. By what rule of interpretation can the same word in the next verse be made to mean indefinite periods? Moreover, it seems from Gen. ii. 5, compared with Gen. i. 11-12, that it had not rained on the earth until the third day; a fact altogether probable, if the days were of twenty-four hours, but absurd if they were long periods [*Hitchcock*].

On the supposition that geological discoveries necessitate the admission of a more remote origin and a longer existence to our globe than a few thousands of years, the true explanation lies in the first verse of Genesis, which leaves an undefined interval between the creation of matter and the six days' work. Why, then, should we not regard the days described by Moses as natural days? Chalmers, Buckland, Sedgwick, Dr. Kurtz, and Archdeacon Pratt and many other writers of eminence, adhere to this view, "that the days of Genesis are literal days; that the ages of geology are passed over silently in the second verse, and that the passage describes a great work of God at the close of the 'Tertiary Period,' by which our planet, after long ages, was finally prepared to be the habitation of man." [*Birks*].

Again, let it be observed that the whole notion of equality of endurance, or of close succession, of these "days" of Creation, is imaginary, and imported into the narrative. The story of Creation is arranged in these periods familiar to us; the great personal cause of every step in it is God, and God's will. But it is as irrevelant and as foolish to inquire minutely into the lower details following on a literal acceptance of the terms used in conveying this great truth to our minds, as it would be to take the same course with the words, "God said," to inquire in what language He spoke, and to whom. It never can be too much impressed upon the reader that we are, while perusing this account, in a realm separated by a gulf, impassable for human thought, from the matter-of-fact revelations which our senses make to us. We are listening to Him who made the world, as He explains to us in words; the imperfect instruments of our limited thoughts, His, to us, inscrutable procedure [*Alford*].

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verse 6—8.

THE ATMOSPHERE.

The word here translated "firmament" more properly means expanse; it comes from a Hebrew verb meaning "to spread out." It is literally "Let there be something spread out between the waters" Let us review the uses of the atmosphere. I. It is necessary to the possibility of human life. Had not the waters been divided by the atmosphere, human life could not have existed. There would have been no chamber in the great universe for the occupation of man. The waters would have prevailed. Whereas by the atmosphere the waters below were divided from those above, and space was left for the residence of man. "The Lord stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in," Isaiah xl. 22. Thus in the work of the second day we have abundant evidence that God was preparing the world for the habitation of man. The atmosphere.—1. *Gathers up the vapours.* 2. *Throws them down again in rain, snow, or dew, when needed.* 3. *Modifies and renders more beautiful the light of the sun.* 4. *Sustains life.* II. It is necessary for the practical purposes of life. Suppose that by some miraculous intervention human life was rendered possible without the existence of the atmosphere, yet it would be useless and vain, totally incapable of occupation. 1. *The atmosphere is necessary for the transmission of sound.* If there were no atmosphere, the bell might be tolled, the cannon might be fired, a thousand voices might render the music of the sweetest hymn, but not the faintest sound would be audible. Thus all commercial, educational and social intercourse would be at an end, as men would not be able to hear each other speak. We seldom think of the worth of the atmosphere around us, never seen, seldom felt, but without which the world would be one vast grave. 2. *The atmosphere is necessary for many purposes related to the inferior objects of the world.* Without it the plants could not live, our gardens would be divested of useful vegetables, and beautiful flowers. Artificial light would be impossible. The lamp of the mines could not be kindled. The candle of the midnight student could never have been lighted. The smoke of the winter fire would not have ascended into the sky. The bird could not have wended its way to heaven's gate to utter its morning song, as there would have been no air to sustain its flight. III. Let us make a practical improvement of the subject. 1. *To be thankful for the air we breathe.* How often do we recognise the air by which we are surrounded as amongst the chief of our daily blessings, and as the immediate and continued gift of God? How seldom do we utter praise for it. It is unseen; often unheard; hence, almost forgotten. Were it visible or audible it might the more readily and frequently inspire us with gratitude. The gift is daily. It is universal. It should evoke the devotion of the world. 2. *To make the best use of the life it preserves.* To cultivate a pure life. To speak golden words. To make a true use of all the subordinate ministries of nature.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 6. That the heaven above is understood by the firmament is evident, because God set the sun, moon and stars therein (Verse 14). And that it includes the air also, is evident from the fact that birds are to fly in it (Verse 20).

God gathered the water below into one channel that the earth might be dry and habitable: however in His wisdom and providence he hath so ordered it that waters issuing out from the seas by secret passages, and breaking out into fountains and rivers, may thereby make fruitful the valleys and lower parts of the earth; yet we know that they reach not to the higher grounds, much less to the tops of the hills. It was, therefore, needful that some water should be carried on high above the hills; that from thence they might distil in showers upon the higher places of the earth to moisten them, that no part thereof might remain unfruitful [*J. White*].

The sky according to optical appearance:—1. Carpet (Ps. civ. 2). 2. A Curtain (Isa. xl. 22). 3. A transparent work of sapphire (Ex. xxiv. 10). 4. A molten looking glass (Job. xxxvii. 18).

The water:—1. Once boundless. 2. Once useless. 3. Now fruitful. 4. Now traversed.

The gathering together of the waters —1. Some think that the earth was a plain without hills, that the waters might the more speedily run together; and that the present inequality in the land began after the flood. 2. That the waters were dried up by the fervent heat of the sun. 3. That the earth was dried up by a mighty wind, as after the deluge. 4. That it was done by the direct command of God.

God's speaking is His making. Word and power go together with Him.

Verse 7. We must acknowledge both the rain and the fruitfulness of the earth as from God. 1. By seeking them at His hand (James v. 17). 2. By returning thanks to Him for them, as blessings of inestimable value, the want of which would ruin the world in one year.

The firmament is a partition between waters and waters.

The firmament doth its duty at God's command, admirably to preserve creatures, and abides.

Verse 8. God who gives being best gives the name to things. Their natures are well known to Him ... The second day is God's creature as the first ... Work and day should lead us more to know God their Maker.

Day and night continue—1. Because the same power that created continues them. 2. Because God is neither capable of error or inconstancy. 3. Learn to regard the Divine Being as immutable.

I. The speaking. II. The dividing. III. The naming.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 9-13.

THE SEA AND THE DRY LAND.

I. The Sea. "And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place." 1. *The method of their location.* The great waters which covered the earth were swept into one place, and were environed by the decree and power of God, so that their wild waves would not advance further than the Divine permission. This allocation of the waters may have been instrumentally accomplished by volcanic agency. The land may have been broken up, and, amidst the general crash, the waters may have rushed to their destined home. When it is said that they were gathered into one place, it simply intimates the interdependence of seas and rivers, and also their unity as contrasted with the dry land. 2. *The degree of their proportion.* We must not imagine that the limit and proportion of the sea to dry land is arbitrary—that it is fixed by chance, but by the utmost exactitude. If the sea were more or less in extent it would be of great injury to the world. If it were smaller, the earth would cease to be verdant and fruitful, as there would not be sufficient water to supply our rivers and streams, or to distil upon the fields. If the sea was larger, the earth would become a vast uninhabitable marsh, from the over abundance of rain. Hence, we see how needful it is that there should be a due proportion between the sea and dry land, and the wisdom and goodness of the Creator, in that it is established so exactly and beneficently. 3. *The extent of their utility.* They not only give fertility to the earth, but they answer a thousand social and commercial purposes. The sea is the highway of the nations. It unites the world in the sympathy of common wants; in the hope of common friendships; and through travel on its waters, men gather a breadth of thought and life, that otherwise, would be impossible to them. The men who go down to the sea in ships, carry on the great business of the world. If they were to cease their occupation, society would receive a serious check. Many of the necessities of life—many of our home comforts are imported from foreign shores, and these we could ill afford to dispense with. Not only are our trade relationships sustained by the passage of vessels from shore to shore, but also our political. In this way, other people see our enterprise, and gather an idea of our national prowess. Especially have we, as a nation, cause to be thankful for the billows which surround our Island home, as our protection from the invasion of a foreign foe, and as our discipline in the event of war. True, the seas of the world are often strewn with wrecks, caused either by fire or storm; they are the resting place of a vast army of once living creatures; they separate loving hearts; but notwithstanding, in the present condition of society, they are far more the occasion of joy and help, than of sorrow or impediment. They make the nations brotherly. But the time is coming when there will be no more sea; its commerce will be ended, and men, living in one great home, will never hear the mutter of the storm, or the music of wave. **II. The dry land.** 1. *The dry land was made to appear.* The land had been created before, but it was covered with a vast expanse of water. Now the waters are removed, the earth is unveiled, and dry land appears at the call of God. Even when things are created, when they merely exist, the Divine call must educate them into the full exercise of their utility, and into the complete manifestation of their beauty. The call of God gives harmony, adaptation, utility, perfection to all human being. It can command the sea into one place of repose. So it can remove the tide of passion from the soul, and make all that is good in human nature to appear. 2. *It was made to be verdant.* "And let the earth bring forth grass." The plants now created are divided into three classes: grass, herb, and tree. In the first, the seed is not noticed, as not obvious to the eye. In the second, the seed is the striking characteristic. In the third, the fruit. This division is simple and natural. It proceeds upon two concurrent marks, the structure and the seed. This division corresponds with certain classes in our present systems of botany. But it is much less simple and complex. Thus was laid the beautiful carpet of green, that is now spread throughout the world, and that is so welcome to the eye of man. God ordered its colour, that it might be the most restful to human vision. When the eye is weak, we often place a green shade over it to obtain ease. Nature might have been clad in a garment gay and unwelcome to the vision of man, but not so, she is either white in the purity of snow, or green in the verdure of spring.—

> "He makes the grass the hills adorn,
> And clothes the smiling fields with corn."

3. *It was made to be fruitful.* "And the fruit tree yielding fruit." The earth is not merely verdant and beautiful to look at, but it is also fruitful and good for the supply of human want. It presents attractions to the eye. But even these are designed to win man, that they may satisfy his temporal need. Nature appears friendly to man, that she may gain his confidence, invite his study, and minister to the removal of his poverty. III. And it was good. 1. *For the life and health of man.* 2. *For the beauty of the universe.* 3. *For the commerce and produce of the nations.*

VEGETATION.

I. That it is the result of a combined instrumentality. 1. *There was the Divine agency.* It was the Power of God that gave seed and life to the earth. For it is very certain that the earth could not have produced grass, and herb, and tree of itself. But when empowered by the Divine mandate there would be no limit to its verdure and fertility. 2. *There was the instrumentality of the earth.* "And God said, let the earth bring forth grass, &c. So when called by God the most barren instrumentalities become life-giving and verdant. When the Divine Being is about to enrich men, he gives them the power to help themselves. The soil that is to be fruitful must aid the growth of its own seed. II. It is germinal in the condition of its growth. "Seed." Fertility never comes all at once. God does not give man blade of grass or tree in full growth, but the seeds from which they are to spring. Germs are a Divine gift. This is not only true in the physical universe, but the mental and the moral. God does not give man a great enterprise, but the first hint of it. He does not make men splendid preachers all at once, but gives only the germinal conditions of the same. Hence, He finds employment for the world. The cultivation of germs is the grandest employment in which men can be engaged. III. It is fruitful in the purpose of its life. "Yielding fruit." 1. *Life must not always remain germinal.* The seed must not alway remain seed. It must expand, develope. This must be the case mentally and morally. Life, when healthy and vigorous, is always progressive and fruitful. The world is full of men who have great thoughts and enterprises in the germ, but they never come to perfection. The fruit must be:— 1. *Abundant.* 2. *Rich.* 3. *Beautiful.* 4. *Refreshing.* IV. It is distinctive in its species and development. "Fruit after his kind." What will Mr. Darwin say to this? Is it not a refutation of his elaborate theory on the origin of species. The growth will always be of the same kind as the seed. There may be variation in the direction and expression of the germinal life, but its original species is unchanged. This is true in the garden of the soul. Every seed produces fruit after its kind.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 9. We must learn to leave our private sphere of life to enhance the common good:—1. Because all creatures are ordained, not for themselves, but for God's honour, for their mutual support, and for the preservation of the community. 2. Because we enjoy nothing in our own exclusive right, but have all of God's free gift. 3. Because the applying of ourselves to the furthering of a common good, is our greatest honour, profit and safety.

All creatures in the world obey the Voice of God:—1. Why should that voice not command them, which made them. 2. Otherwise, it were impossible for God to do all things in righteousness. 3. Let us tremble at the Power of Him whom the winds and seas obey.

Let all men lay it to heart, and bless the Author of this great mercy, when they look upon the firm foundation of their houses, the fruits of the grounds, the increase of their cattle; when they enjoy the air to breathe in, the dry ground to walk on, and the seas to wade in. And let men walk in fear before that God who might as easily let loose the sea, as keep it within the bounds that He hath set [*J. White*].

The use of the sea:—1. To fill the hearts of men with fear of that Great God, by beholding so vast a creature ordered by His power. 2. By observing that by it way is made to the discovering of the large circuit of the earth. 3. Beneficial to the life of man by enlarging his sphere of work and intercourse.

Verse 10. To God belongs the naming as the making of His creatures; the seas are the waters gathered into their due place. Good is this globe:—1. Suitable unto God's mind. 2. Suitable to His own idea of it. 3. Suitable for the residence of man. The beauty of the earth; the sublimity of the sea. The creatures of God's making are good.

Verse 11. It is God's word that makes the earth fruitful. Propagation of fruit, as well as the first being of it, is by God's word; He makes the seed and enables it to multiply.

Verse 12. God will have nothing barren or unprofitable:—1. Not the earth. 2. Not the herbs nor plants. 3. Not the beasts, fishes, fowls. 4. Not the sun, moon, nor stars, which cherish all things by their light. 5. Certainly not man. Why? 1. Because all things were made to be fruitful. 2. That they may testify to the overflowing bounty of God.

Even the grass, herbs, trees, are God's creatures:—1. Let us take notice of them as such.—(1.) Their infinite variety. (2.) Their beautiful shape. (3.) Their marvellous growth. (4.) Their life, which kings cannot give nor art imitate. God draws life out of death. 1. God can do it—He is the Life. 2. It is fit He should do it to His glory. 3. Let not the Church despair.

God provides for all his creatures, that though they decay daily, yet they shall not wholly perish:—1. To shew His own unchangeable continuance by the mutability of His creatures. 2. To quicken us into a desire for heaven, where all things are constant and durable. 3. To shew, in the variety of His works, His eternal wisdom.

The teaching of the plants—1. To have a life full of good seed. 2. To let the goodness of our moral nature come to maturity. 3. To care for our posterity. 4. To aid the life and enjoyment of others.

Fruit resembles the nature of the stock from which it comes—1. Therefore let good men shew forth the renewing of their nature by the works of the spirit. 2. Abhor all hypocrisy.

Verse 13. The evening—1. A time for thought. 2. A time for prayer. 3. A time for fear. 4. An emblem of life.

The morning—1. A time for praise. 2. A time for hope. 3. A time for resolution. 4. A time for work.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 14—19.

THE HEAVENLY BODIES.

As we have seen, light had been created before; and now the heavenly bodies are introduced into the complete exercise of their light-giving purpose. I. The heavenly bodies were called into existence by God. "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven," &c. On this supposition only, that the heavenly bodies were called into space by the word of God, can we account for their magnitude, variety, and splendour? 1. *Their magnitude.* Only a Divine voice could have called the great worlds into being which people the realms of space. They would not have yielded obedience to the command of man had He spoken never so loud and long. True, magnitude is not always associated with power, but sometimes with weakness; yet the vastness of the great heavens above us is such as we can only connect with the voice and power of God. 2. *Their variety.* There is the sun, moon, stars. The sun to rule the day The moon to rule the night. The stars to be the bright attendants of the midnight Queen. The star-light sky is the very emblem of variety, as to magnitude, number, and beauty. 3. *Their splendour.* What artist could put the splendour of the evening sky upon his canvass? What speaker could describe the glory of the midnight heaven? The stars, shining out from the violet deeps of night, are as brilliant lights in the dome of our earth-house, and are as the bright carpet of heaven. Before this unrivalled scene all human effort to attain grandeur is feeble, all the achievements of art or science are powerless to imitate it; yet one tone of the Divine voice was sufficient to bid the heavenly bodies move into their spheres and work, in which they will continue until the same voice bids them halt in their celestial course. 1. *The call was Omnipotent.* Man could not have kindled the great lights of the universe. They are above his reach. They are deaf to his voice. They ofttimes strike him with fear. The sun-light has to be modified before he can use it. The moon is beyond the control of man, or he would never permit her waning. The brighest seraph, whose whole being is aglow with the light of God, could not have flung these celestial orbs into the heavens. Cherubim shed their lustre in other spheres, and for other purposes. They cannot create an atom. How the power of God is lifted above that of the most dignified creature He has made. His voice is omnipotent, and is therefore sufficient to call the sun, moon, and stars to their work. Only Infinite Wisdom could have uttered this behest to the heavenly bodies. 2. *The call was wise.* The idea of the midnight sky, as now beheld by us, could never have originated in a finite mind. The thought was above the mental life of seraphs. It was the outcome of an Infinite intelligence. And nowhere throughout the external universe do we see the wisdom of God as in the complicated arrangement, continual motions, and yet easily working and harmony of the heavenly bodies. There is no confusion. There is no disorder. They need no re-adjustment. They are alike the admiration of art and science. In their study the greatest genius has exhausted its energy. The great clock of the world never needs repairs, nor even the little process of winding up. The midnight sky is the open page of wisdom's grandest achievements. 3. *The call was benevolent.* The sun is one of the most kindly gifts of God to the world; it makes the home of man a thing of beauty. Also the light of the moon is welcome to multitudes who have to wend their way by land or sea, amid the stillness of night, to some far-off destination. 4. *The call was typal.* The same Being who has placed so many lights in the heavens, can also suspend within the firmament of the soul the lights of truth, hope, and immortality. The sun of the soul need never set; our thought and feeling may be ever touched by its beauty, until the light of earth's transient day shall break into the eternal light of the heavenly Temple II. The purposes for which the heavenly bodies are designed. 1. *They were to be for lights.* There had been light before. But now it is to be realised; it is to become brighter, clearer, and fuller, more fit for all the requirements of human life. Hence, at the command of God, all the lamps of the universe were lighted for the convenience and utility of man. They are unrivalled, should be highly prized, faithfully used, carefully studied, and devotionally received. These lights were regnant:—(1.) *Their rule is authoritative.* (2.) *It is extensive.* (3.) *They were alternate.* (4.) *It is munificent.* (5.) *It is benevolent.* (6.) *It is welcome.* A pattern for all monarchs. 2. *They were made to divide the day from the night.* Thus the heavenly bodies were not only intended to give light, but also to indicate and regulate the time of man, that he might be reminded of the mighty change, and rapid flight of life. But the recurrence of day and night also proclaim the need of exertion and repose, hence they call to work, as well as remind of the grave. 3. *To be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years.* The moon by her four quarters, which last each a little more than seven days, measures for us the weeks and the months. The sun, by his apparent path in the sky, measures our seasons and our years, whilst by his daily rotation through the heavens he measures the days and the hours; and this he does so correctly that the best watch makers in Geneva regulate all their watches by his place at noon; and from the most ancient times men have measured from sun dials the regular movement of the shadow. It has been well said that the progress of a people in civilization may be estimated by their regard for time,—their care in measuring and valuing it. Our time is a loan. It is God's gift to us. We ought to use it as faithful stewards. We shall have to give an account of its use. "O Lord, so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. xc. 12). "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I cry aloud; and He shall hear my voice." Thus the solar system is man's great teacher, monitor, and benefactor. III. A few deductions from this subject. 1. *The greatness and Majesty of God.* How terrible must be the Creator of the sun. How tranquil must be that Being who has given light to the moon. How unutterably great must be the Author of that vast solar system. One glance into the heavens is enough to overawe man with a sense of the Divine majesty. 2. *The humility that should characterise the soul of man.* "When I consider the heavens the work of Thine hand," &c. What great thing is there in man that Thou art mindful of him? Man, a little lower than the angels, should rival them in the devotion and humility of his soul. Under the broad heaven man must feel his littleness, though he cannot but be conscious of his greatness, in that so grand a curtain was spread out for him by the Infinite Creator,

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 14. God has placed the lights above us:—1. As ornaments of His throne. 2. To shew forth His majesty. 3. That they may the more conveniently give their light to all parts of the world. 4. To manifest that light comes from heaven, from the Father of Lights. 5. The heavens are most agreeable to the nature of these lights. 6. By their moving above the world at so great a distance, they help to discover the vast circuit of the heavens.

The heavenly bodies:—1. Not to honour them as gods. 2. To honour God in and by them. (Ps. viii. 1; Tim vi. 16; Isa. vi. 2.)

The place and use of creatures are assigned unto them by God:—1. That He may manifest His sovereignity. 2. That He may establish a settled order amongst the creatures. 3. Let all men abide in their sphere and calling. (1.) To testify their obedience to the will of God. (2.) As God knows what is best for us. (3.) As assured that God will prosper all who fulfil His purpose concerning them.

The highest creatures are ordained by God for use and service:—1. Men of the highest rank should apply themselves to some employment for the good of others. 2. They are ordained for it. 3. They are honoured thereby. 4. They are bound thereunto by the law of love. 5. They will be rewarded hereafter. 6. Christ has set them an example.

The night is a Divine ordination:—1. To set bounds to man's labour. 2. To temperate the air. 3. To allow the refreshing dews to fall upon the earth. 4. To manifest the comfort of light by its removal.

The stars a sign:—1. Of the providence of God. 2. Of the olden folly of men. 3. Of the changing moods of life.

These luminaries are sometimes made by God amazing signs of grace and justice.

These luminaries have natural significations at all times.

Power and influence, as two causes, God hath given to the luminaries.

Verse 16. Light:—1. Its speed. 2. Its profusion. 3. Its beauty. 4. Its joy.

The excellencies of creatures are not of themselves, but are the gift of God: 1. Because all perfections are originally in God, and therefore must come by way of dispensation from Him. 2. That the honour of all might return to Him alone. 3. Let men acknowledge all their abilities as from God. 4. Seeking all at His hand. 5. Enjoying them without pride. 6. Giving thanks to Him for them. 7. Using them to His glory.

What it was that carried the light about the world before the sun was made is uncertain; only this is evident, that when God had created the body of the sun, and made it fit for that use, He planted the light therein; and then that other means ceased, whatsoever it was. So that where God provides ordinary means, there He usually takes away those which are extraordinary:—1. Because God makes nothing in vain, and consequently removes that for which there is no further use. 2. Lest other ordinary means should be despised. 3. Let no man depend upon extraordinary means.

Though the planets are so far distant from us, yet this does not interrupt their light and influence. So distance cannot hinder us from receiving the benefit of God's care. 1. Though God's influence be in heaven, yet His eye beholds the children of men. 2. Let no man's heart fail him because God seems so far off. 3. Let not distance, either in place or condition hinder our desires for the good of others.

Verses 16—19. God proportions the abilities of His creatures according to the uses in which He employs them:—1. Thus is the natural outcome of the Divine wisdom and sufficiency. 2. Necessary to make the workman equal to his task.

Men must make use of light to guide and direct them in all their employments.

Though all the creatures are not furnished alike, yet none of them lack that which is necessary for their use and employment:—1. Let no man repine at his condition. 2 Let no man envy another. 3. All degrees of men are useful. 4. We cannot enjoy true happiness without attention to the meanest duties around us. 5. We know not to what the meanest may be advanced hereafter.

God provides for the governmen of the day as well as of the night:—1 He can do it, as light and darkness ar alike to him. 2. He must do it t keep the world in order. 3. The night cannot hide our sins from God.

These lights were good works of God. These glorious works must lead to Creator.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 20—23.

FISH AND FOWL.

I. That life is the immediate creation of God. "And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creatures that hath life," &c. Here we get sublime teaching in reference to the origin of *life*. 1. *It was not as* *education.* It was not evoked from anything that had previously existed. It was not an emanation from some elementary principle or form of matter. It was not an unconscious development. Life bounded into existence at the call of God, and kindled its lights in the lower realms of nature, that ultimately it might shine resplendent, and find its highest perfection and beauty in the being and soul of man. Life as an education is the foolish conceit of a sceptical philosophy. 2. *It was not the result of combination.* Prior to the existence of fish and fowl; there had been created the land, the light, the water, and the heavenly bodies had received their commission to illumine the universe. But life was not awakened by the combined agency of any of these. They were without life. The light might fall upon the great world uninhabited, but its ray could not evoke one note of life, or give impulse to the smallest object on which it fell. Matter is capable of many pleasing and useful combinations, but has inherently no life-producing property. 3. *It was a miraculous gift.* "And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life." There are two words in this sentence that should be remembered, and joined together most closely, they are "God" and "life." This should be so in the external universe, for if God were to withdraw from it, its whole frame would crumble into dust. This should be so in the soul of man, as God is the source of its true and higher life. If the church were to remember the connexion of these two great words, she would be much more powerful in her toil. Life was at first the miraculous gift of God. Its continuance is His gift. It is the product of His voice. This is true of all in whom the spark of life is kindled, whether seraph or brute. II. That life is varied in its manifestation and capability. 1. *Life is varied in its manifestations.* There were created on this day both fish and fowl. "God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind." Thus life is not a monotony. It assumes different forms. It gives varied impulses. It grows in different directions. It has several kingdoms. It has numerous conditions of growth. 2. *Life is varied in its capability.* As life is varied in its kind and growth, so is it in its capability. The fish swim in the water. The fowls fly in the air; the abilities and endowments of each are distinct and varied. They answer different purposes. Each takes a part in the great ministry of the universe. The whole in harmony is the joy of man. Envy is unknown in the lower region of life. 3. *Life is abundant and rich in its source.* The waters brought forth abundantly. There was no lack of life-giving energy on the part of God. Its source was smitten, and life streamed forth in rich abundance. The world is crowded with life. It will not soon become extinct. Its supplies will not soon be exhausted. The universe will not soon become a grave, for even in death there is life, hidden but effective to a new harvest. 4. *Life is good in its design.* God saw that it was good. All life is good in its original intention. It was good as the gift of God, and as the glory of its possessor. III That the lower spheres of life are richly endowed with the Divine Blessing. The blessing is from God. The truest source of benediction. The highest hope of man. The richest heritage of nature. It had its earnest in the life then commenced. The fish and fowl then created were prophetic of future blessing. 1. *It was the blessing of increasing numbers.* 2. *It was the blessing of an extended occupation of the land and sea.* 3. *Let us always remember that the blessing of God rests upon the lower spheres of life.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 20. The decree. 2. The order. 3. The manner. 4 The kinds. 5. The places. 6. The blessing.

God leaves nothing empty that he hath made, but furnisheth all with His store and riches. Thus when He had created the heavens, He furnished them with stars, the air with birds, the water with fishes, and the earth with herbs and plants, and afterwards with beasts and men; so that the earth is full of His riches, and so is the wide sea. 1. Then will God leave His children empty, the vessels which He hath formed for Himself? 2. Let men be ashamed that delight in empty houses, or lands unpeopled, that they may dwell alone. 3. We cannot but admire the affluent power of God.

God disposeth all creatures, in such places, as are most convenient unto them. He fixes the stars in the heavens, carries the clouds in the air, appoints the waters for the fishes. 1. Let us seek places suited to our disposition and temper. 2. Let us comfort ourselves in reference to our heavenly home, in that it will be suited to our condition.

Life is the gift of God alone. 1. Because God only hath life. 2. That it may be at His disposal. 3. That He may be praised for it.

1. Let every man be careful to preserve in any creature so precious a gift. 2. Let every man glorify God in whose hand his breath is. 3. Let it teach us to abase all man's work in comparison with God's. Men can make pictures and statutes, but cannot give them breath.

The variety and diversity of God's works is infinite.

The motion as well as the being of every creature is ordered and limited by the will and decree of God.

All these creatures were at first produced in full strength for motion.

The water for fish, and the expanse over the earth for fowl, are places of sustentation.

Verse 21. The eminency of any creature ought especially to be observed for magnifying the work of the Creator. 1. The great lights. 2. The great whales. 3. After God's image.

God furnisheth every creature with parts and abilities, needful for the nature of it, and use, to which He hath assigned it.

God respects and takes special notice of all, even the meanest of the works that He hath made.

1. Let the poorest and most neglected of men trust the providence of God. 2. Let the richest stoop to the poor.

Even the meanest of the creatures that God hath made are good. (1.) As the effects of His power. (2.) As they serve His glory. (3.) As they are useful to man. (4.) Let us do nothing but that which we can approve.

Verses 22, 23. Fruitfulness is a blessing bestowed only by God Himself. 1. Seek it by prayer. 2. Expect it by faith. 3. Wait for it in obedience. 4. Receive it with praise.

There is nothing so vast or wide but God can easily furnish and fill it at His pleasure.

God's blessing in creation makes these creatures abundant now.

Every fish and bird is a demonstration of God's wisdom, and power and goodness.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 24—25.

The Animal World.

I. That the Animal World was created by God. All the creeping things of the earth are created by God. The cattle upon a thousand hills were made by Him. There is not an insect in the universe, but is the outcome of Divine power. Life, in its very lowest form, is the gift of God. Science cannot obtain it; Art cannot evoke it; dexterity cannot conjure it: God is its only source. If the animal world is created by God:—1. *We should regard the animal world with due appreciation.* Man has too low an estimate of the animal world. We are apt to think that there is very little difference between it, and the vegetable world. We imagine that a tree has as much claim to our attention and regard as a horse. This should not be the case. The latter has a spirit; is possessed of life; it is a nobler embodiment of Divine power; it is a nearer approach to the fulfilment of Creation. We ought therefore to place a higher estimate upon animal life than we do, as we are largely ignorant of its capabilities, and of the development and progress of which it is capable. A worm may teach the soul of man a lesson. We are not cognizant of its hidden power. 2. *We should treat the animal world with humane consideration.* If all the animals of the universe, which are so useful to man, are the creation of God, then surely they ought to have the most kindly treatment of the human race. Surely, we ought not to abuse anything on which God has bestowed a high degree of creative care, especially when it is intended for our welfare. Also, these animals are dumb; this ought to make us attentive to their wants, as well as considerate in all our treatment of them. Men should never manifest an angry spirit toward them. The merciful man is merciful to his beast. True, the brute world was designed by God for the use of man, and it renders its highest service in the gift of its life for the sustentation of the human family. II. That the Animal World was designed by God for the service of man. 1. *Useful for business.* How much of the business of man is carried on by the aid of animals. They afford nearly the only method of transit by road and street. Many men get their livelihood by trading in animals. The commercial enterprise of our villages and towns would receive a serious check if the services of the animal creation were removed. 2. *Needful for food.* Each answers a distinct purpose toward the life of man; from them we get our varied articles of food, and also of clothing. These animals were intended to be the food of man, to impart strength to his body, and energy to his life. To kill them is no sacrilege. Their death is their highest ministry, and we ought to receive it as such; not for the purpose of gluttony, but of health. Thus is our food the gift of God. III. That the Animal World was an advance in the purpose of Creation. The chaos had been removed, and from it order and light had been evoked. The seas and the dry land had been made to appear. The sun, moon, and stars had been sent on their light-giving mission. The first touch of life had become visible in the occupants of the waters and the atmosphere, and now it breaks into larger expanse in the existence of the animal creation, awaiting only its final completion in the being of man. IV. That the Animal World was endowed with the power of growth and continuance, and was good in the sight of God. 1. *The growth and continuance of the animal world was insured.* Each animal was to produce its own kind, so that it should not become extinct; neither could one species pass into another by the operation of any physical law. 2. *The animal world was good in the sight of God.* It was free from pain. The stronger did not oppress, and kill the weaker. The instinct of each animal was in harmony with the general good of the rest. But animals have shared the fate of man, the shadow of sin rests upon them; hence their confusion and disorder, their pain, and the many problems they present to the moral philosopher.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 24, 25. The beasts inferior to man:—1. In nature. 2. In advancement. 3. In spiritual estate.

The difference between the creation of beasts and man cannot be passed over without special observation. Man's body was indeed taken out of the earth, as well as the bodies of the beasts; but his soul was not from the earth, but from heaven. But in the creation of beasts, the body, and soul, or life, is wholly out of the earth; for the earth is commanded to bring forth the living creature—that is, the creature, with the life thereof. So that we find no original of the soul, or life of the beast, but from the earth only.

The beasts were created by God, and therefore are His.—1. Let us ascribe all the store that we have unto God. 2. Let us regard them as the gift of God. 3. Let us serve and honour Him with all we possess.

By an almighty word God doth create all the brutes upon the earth.

The earth is the appointed place for beasts.

Not only individuals of creatures, but kinds, are made of God

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 21—28.

The Creation of Man.

I. That the Creation of Man was preceded by a Divine consultation. "And God said, Let us make man," &c. 1. *This consultation was Divine.* It was a consultation held by the three Persons of the ever Blessed Trinity, who were one in the creative work. We are not now listening to the voice of angels; they cannot create an atom, much less a man. They were themselves created. But now the Uncreated Ones are contemplating the existence of man, to give completion and meaning to their previous work. Man is the explanation of the universe. 2. *This consultation was solemn.* The light, the waters and dry land, the heavenly bodies, and the brute world, had all heard the voice of God, and obeyed it. But no consultation had been held prior to their entrance into the world. Why? because they were matter; dumb, and impotent. But now is to be created a Being endowed with mind and volition, capable even of rebellion against his Creator. There must be a pause before such a being is made. The project must be considered. The probable issue must be calculated. His relation to heaven and earth must be contemplated. It is a solemn event. The world is to have an intelligent occupant, the first of a race, endowed with superior power and influence over the future of humanity. In him terrestrial life will reach its perfection; in him Deity will find the child of its solicitude; in him the universe will centre its mystery. Truly this is the most solemn moment of time. the occasion is worthy the council chambers of eternity. 3. *This consultation was happy.* The Divine Being had not yet given out, in the creative work, the highest thought of His mind; He had not yet found outlet for the larger sympathies of His heart in the universe He had just made and welcomed into being. The light could not utter all His beneficence. The waters could not articulate all His power. The stars did but whisper His name But the being of man is vocal with God, as is no other created object. He is a revelation of his Maker in a very high degree. In him the Divine thought and sympathy found welcome outlet. The creation of man was also happy in its bearing toward the external universe. The world is finished. It is almost silent. There is only the voice of the animal creation to break its stillness. But man steps forth into the desolate home. He can sing a hymn — he can offer a prayer — he can commune with God—he can occupy the tenantless house. Hence the council that contemplated his creation would be happy. II. That man was created in the image of God. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Man was originally God-like, with certain limitations. In what respect was man created after the image of God?—1. *In respect to his intelligence.* God is the Supreme Mind. He is the Infinite Intelligence. Man is like Him in that he also is gifted with mind and intelligence; he is capable of thought. But the human intelligence, in comparison with the Divine, is but as a spark in comparison with the fontal source of light. The great Thinkers of the age are a proof of the glory of the human intellect. 2. *In respect to his moral nature.* Man is made after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness. He was made with a benevolent disposition, with happy and prayerful spirit, and with a longing desire to promote the general good of the universe; in these respects he was like God, who is infinitely pure, Divinely happy in His life, and in deep sympathy with all who are within the circle of His Being. 3. *In respect to his dominion.* God is the Supreme Ruler of all things in heaven and in earth. Both angels and men are His subjects. Material Nature is part of His realm, and is under His authority. In this respect, man is made in the image of God. He is the king of this world. The brute creation is subject to his sway. Material forces are largely under his command. Man is the deity of the inferior creation. He holds a sceptre that has been Divinely placed in his hand. 4. *In respect to his immortality.* God is eternal. He is immortal. Man partakes of the Divine immortality. Man, having commenced the race of being, will run toward a goal he can never reach. God, angels and men are the only immortalities of which we are cognizant. What an awful thing is life. 5. *In respect to the power of creatorship.* Man has, within certain limits, the power of creatorship. He can design new patterns of work. He can induce new combinations, and from them can evoke results hitherto unknown. By the good use of certain materials, he can make many wonderful and useful things calculated to enhance the welfare of mankind. Think of the inventive and productive genius of George Stevenson, and others who have enriched society by their scientific or mechanical labours. There is in all this—though it falls far short of Creation—a something that marks man as in the image of God. III. That the creation of man in the Divine image is a fact well attested. "So God created man in his own image" (Verse 27). This perfection of primeval manhood is not the fanciful creation of artistic genius—it is not the dream of poetic imagination—it is not the figment of a speculative philosophy; but it is the calm statement of Scripture. 1. *It is attested by the intention and statement of the Creator.* It was the intention of God to make man after His own image, and the workman generally follows out the motive with which he commences his toil. And we have the statement of Scripture that He did so in this instance. True, the image was soon marred and broken, which could not have been the case had it not previously existed. How glorious must man have been in his original condition. 2. *It is attested by the very fall of man.* How wonderful are the capabilities of even our fallen manhood. The splendid ruins are proof that once they were a magnificent edifice. What achievements are made by the intellect of man—what loving sympathies are given out from his heart—what prayers arise from his soul—of what noble activities is he capable; these are tokens of fallen greatness, for the being of the most splendid manhood is but the rubbish of an Adam. Man must have been made in the image of God, or the grandeur of his moral ruin is inexplicable. Learn:—1. *The dignity of man's nature.* 2. *The greatness of man's fall.* 3. *The glory of man's recovery by Christ.*

WHAT IS THE IMAGE OF GOD IN WHICH MAN WAS CREATED?

I. Negatively. Let us see wherein the image of God in man does NOT consist. Some, for instance, the Socinians, maintain that it consists in that *power and dominion that God gave Adam over the creatures.* True, man was vouched God's immediate deputy upon earth, the viceroy of the Creation. But that this power and dominion is not adequately and completely the image of God is clear from two considerations:—1. *Then he that had most power and dominion would have most of God's image,* and consequently Nimrod had more of it than Noah, Saul than Samuel, Cæsar than Christ—which is a blasphemous paradox. 2. *Self-denial and humility will make us unlike.* II. Positively. Let us see wherein the image of God in man DOES consist. It is that universal rectitude of all the faculties of the soul—by which they stand, act, and dispose their respective offices and operations, which will be more fully set forth by taking a distinct survey of it in the several faculties belonging to the soul; in the understanding, in the will, in the passions or affections. 1. *In the understanding.* At its first creation it was sublime, clear, and inspiring. It was the leading faculty. There is as much difference between the clear representations of the understanding then, and the obscure discoveries that it makes now, as there is between the prospect of landscape from a casement, and from a keyhole. This image was apparent:—(i.) *In the understanding speculative.* (ii.) *In the practical understanding.* 2. *In the will.* The will of man in the state of innocence had an entire freedom to accept or not the temptation. The will then was ductile and pliant to all the motions of right reason. It is in the nature of the will to follow a superior guide—to be drawn by the intellect. But then it was subordinate, not enslaved, not as a servant to a master, but as a queen to her king, who both acknowledges her subjection and yet retains her majesty. 3. *In the passion. Love.* Now, this affection in the state of innocence, was happily pitched upon its right object; it flamed up in direct fervours of devotion to God, and in collateral emissions of charity to its neighbour. *Hatred.* It was then like aloes, bitter, but wholesome. *Anger. Joy. Sorrow. Hope. Fear.* The use of this point—that man was created in the image of God—might be various; but it shall be twofold:—(i.) *To remind us of the irreparable loss we have sustained by sin.* (ii.) *To teach us the excellency of the Christian religion.* [*Robert South, D.D.*]

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 26. Man God's last work:—1. Then man is God's greatest care. 2. Then let man give him the best service.

God has provided all things needful for man's supply.

Works that are important ought to be undertaken with counsel:—1. We see not all things. 2. Others are willing to help us. 3. The welfare of others may be concerned in our actions.

Man hath no maker but God alone:—1. Then let us praise Him alone. 2. Let us serve Him entirely. 3. Let us seek to know Him fully.

God's image in man is his greatest glory:—1. Not his ancestry. 2. Not his wealth. 3. Not his fame.

God hath advanced man to have dominion over all the works of His hands:—1. To enjoy the benefit of them. 2. To take care of them. 3. To make a good use of them. 4. To live superior to them.

Man's dominion is God's free gift:—1. Therefore we are to recognise God's authority in its use. 2. Remember that we are only stewards. 3. Be thankful for our kingship

God hath made Himself known in trinity of relation, as well as unity of being from the beginning.

God the Father, Son, and Spirit, put forth wisdom, power, and goodness, eminently in making man.

Man in his first estate was a creature bearing the most exact image of God's rectitude.

The image of God in man was made and created, not begotten, as in the Eternal Son.

Made, in this image, was the best of terrestial creatures, for whom all the rest were made.

The image of God resting upon man did fit him to rule over all the creatures subjected.

Verses 27—28. Male and female are the ordination of God.

It is by God's blessing that man must be sustained, as well as by His power that he was created.

God will have men to understand the blessings He gives them.

God can easily bring multitudes out of one.

All men and nations in the world are of one blood, and have one Father.

Man:—1. He has to replenish the earth. 2. To subdue it. 3. To rule it.

Those who have possessions in the earth must use and husband them, that they may be useful and fruitful.

All the creatures of the earth are the servants of man by the appointment of God.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 29—31

THE UNIVERSE GOD'S GIFT TO MAN.

I. The Gift. 1. *Extensive.* The Universe is a Divine gift to man. It was designed for the occupation of man. The home, with all its furniture, was presented to him. Nature, from its highest manifestations to its lowest was to minister to his happiness and need. 2. *Valuable.* The smallest things in nature are valuable. Who can tell the value of the tree, of the herb, of the grass of the field? Diamonds are not more valuable than these; yet they are the constant and everyday gift of God to man. 3. *Increasing.* Every day the gift is increasing in value. It becomes more expansive. It is better known, and more thoroughly appreciated. Scientific research is giving man to see the richness of the Creator's gift. All the gifts of God are productive; time unfolds their measure, discloses their meaning, and demonstrates their value. II. The purpose. 1. *To evince love.* One of the great objects of creation was to manifest the love of God to the human race, which was shortly to be brought into existence. The light, the sun, the stars, and the creation of man; all these were the love-tokens of God. These were designed, not to display the creative power—His wisdom, but His desire for the happiness of man. 2. *To teach truth.* The world is a great school. It is well supplied with teachers. It will teach an attentive student great lessons. All the Divine gifts are instructive. 3. *To sustain life.* God created man without means, but it was not His will to preserve him without; hence He tells him where he is to seek his food. We must make use of such creatures as God has designed for the preservation of our life. God has provided for the preservation of all life. Let us learn to trust God for the necessities of life in times of adversity. Men who have the greatest possessions in the world must receive their daily food from the hand of God.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 29—31. **I. Let every one depend upon God for the necessaries of life.** 1. *Asking them by prayer.* 2. *Acknowledging our own beggary.* 3. *Trusting Him by faith.* 4. *Remembering His promise.* 5. *Obedient to His will.*

II. Let us serve Him faithfully at whose table we are fed. 1. *Else we are ungrateful.* 2. *Else we deserve famine.*

All the provisions that God allows man for food are drawn out of the earth.

The homeliness of the provision on which God intended man to feed.

Let **no man be** discontented with mean fare:—1. It is as good as the body it nourishes. 2. It is better than we deserve. 3. It is more than we are able to procure of ourselves. 4. It is more profitable for health. 5. It is free from the temptation to excess.

God gives us not all our provisions at once, but a daily supply of them:—1. To manifest His fatherly care. 2. To make us dependent on Him. 3. To exercise our faith. 4. To teach economy.

God makes provision for *all* the creatures He hath made.

Man was not only a good creature, but a blessed one.

SUGGESTIVE ILLUSTRATIONS FOR CHAPTER I.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM ADAMSON.

VERSE 1.

Science, Godless. Godless science reads nature only as Milton's daughters did Hebrew; rightly syllabling the sentences, but utterly ignorant of the meaning [*S. Coley*].

Design! Creation is not caprice or chance. It is design. The footprints on the sands of time speak of design, for geology admits that her discoveries all are based upon design. And this verse, as the whole creation narrative, confirms the admission of science as to design. Therefore both the Revelation of God and the Revelation of Nature go hand in hand. The one has on its bosom the finger marks of God, the other wears in its heart the footprints of God. Both of them sketch cartoons more wonderful than Raphael; friezes grander than those of Parthenon; sculptures more awe-inspiring than those of Karnac and Baalbec; which then is the higher? Surely, Revelation. And why? (1.) *Because Revelation alone can tell the design.* Nature is a riddle without revelation:—A Dædalian labyrinth with Gen. i. 1, for its gold thread. I may admire the intricate mechanism of machinery; or even part of the design hanging from the loom; but all is apparent confusion until the master takes me to the office, places plans before me, and so discloses the design. Revelation is that plan—that key by which man is able to unlock the arcana of nature's loom. (2.) *Because that design is the law of Christ.* All are parts of one mighty creation, of which Christ is the centre. He is the Alpha and the Omega—the eternal pivot of creation, like Job's luminous hinge (*chimeh*, a pivot), known as Alcyone, around which Madler has established that the universe revolves in wondrous circuit, and of which Jehovah asks the patriarch: "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades?" The Pythagorean idea of the "music of the spheres" has its origin after all from the design displayed by Revelation. And it is that design—that Divine law in Nature we accept; not Darwin's theory of development—not Powell's universal dominion of law—not Wallace's "law a necessity of things." When he asserts that he is merely saying a loud Amen! to the simple, sublime, and sufficient solution that the grand ideal of Revelation and Nature is the glory of the God-man, who is the brightness of the

Father's glory and the express image of His person.

As Layard and Rawlinson have proved the truth of the Scripture narrative from relics left behind in the mounds of Khorsabad and Temples of Memphis and Thebes—as the Palestine Exploration have established the truth of the sacred assertions as to ancient Jebus, and the huge foundation stone and water seas of Solomon's temple—as Professor Porter has substantiated the Mosaic account of the Giant Cities of Bashan by discovering the ruins of these vast stone fortresses, towns—and, as Mr. George Smith has, by exploring the ruins of Nineveh and Babylon, confirmed the Noachic narrative of the Deluge from the brick and tile slates in broken fragments; so pious-minded geologists have dived among the pages of Nature's volume, and from the remains of the Pre-Adamite world constructed the successive scenery wrapt up in vv. 1, 2. Still, even then they are as far as ever from the Beginning, and are glad to fall back upon the simple, sublime, and sufficient solution: In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.

The mind of the atheist is like a vessel which has been filled with paint, and into which water is subsequently poured; it retains its prejudices, so that its conclusions are affected by them.

Atheism, Wilful.

The owlet Atheism,
Sailing on obscene wings across the moon,
Drops his blue-fringed lids and shuts them close,
And, hooting at the glorious sun in Heaven,
Cries out, "Where is it?" [*S. T. Coleridge*].

If heathenism is like the North Pole in its natural characteristics, by laying too much stress upon the bare letter of creation (see Rom. i.); then Atheism is like the North Pole, by laying too little stress. It, *i.e.* positive philosophy—as Mr. Harrison and John Stuart Mill euphoniously style Atheism—strangles all life, and leaves creation like the inaccessible and impenetrable wilds of the Antarctic Circle—bleak, dreary, dead.

If the charge has been true in past times that some students of Revelation wished to make Revelation an inverted pyramid resting on a narrower apex; it is certainly far more justifiable to assert that these Atomic philosophers would make Revelation like a broken pillar in the churchyard of death; whereas God has made it a temple—not only radiant with fair colours and radiating with sapphires—but teeming with living worshippers.

Cultivation. The eye can be trained to discover beauty in the landscape, and in works of art—or it may have its many powers of vision impaired and destroyed, by gazing at the sun, or on the snow. So man may train his mind to discern the beauties of Divine wisdom, power, and goodness in the processes of nature. Or still further to pursue this subject: if a person in perversity shuts out the light from his dwelling, and lives for years in darkness, the effect would be that eventually he would grow sickly and wretched—like those plants which are reared in cellars, from which all sunlight is rigidly excluded. The mind that shuts out God from nature becomes sickly, and loses the power of enjoying the sunlight. It is therefore not only pleasing, but profitable, to cultivate the habit of tracing tracks of the Divine foot-prints on Nature's breast. To him, who can read it aright, that surface is covered with celestial types and prophetic hieroglyphics—marked like the dial-plate of a watch. Not that Nature has on her page hieroglyphics, which spell out a pardon for sin. Those marks only tell of His wisdom, benevolence, and majesty; and so far as Nature is concerned, the proposition, that must be solved before my dying pillow can be peace, remains unexplicated—unreconciled—and unknown.

Reason and Revelation. Sailing over the great oceans of our earth, the voyager sometimes sees on the far-off horizon a thin mist-cloud or streak, which to my telescope leaps up a green island, cut off from the mainland by a broad belt of waters, too broad to look across, and whose indwellers have no means of passage, well represents our world regarded apart from revelation. You stand on the highest hill in the island, and you see nothing but the girdling sea. The people of the island "dwell *alone*." There are traditions, it may be, of white-sailed ships, and of visitors from lands across the ocean; but these traditions belong to the far-vanished past. The little sea-girt island sits in the sea, alone, and is sundered from all intercourse, other than chance or shipwreck bring from the mainland. Now, as I have said, may I not thus symbolize our earth apart from the Bible? To sense and unaided reason, we too seem to occupy just such an ocean-girt island, divided and sundered from the spirit-realms. But it is not so. *This earth of ours is not the lonely place it seems.* Far up above its din, and tumult, and dust,—

"Beyond the glittering starry skies,"

is a pure and blessed world—sinless, sorrowless—where "the High and Lofty One" unveils His glory to the blessed dwellers; and with this high, and holy, and radiant world we are connected. Do you ask me how? My answer is, by the mediation of Christ, our High-Priest—by the thousand thousand cries of prayer—by the magnanimous abiding of the Holy Spirit—by heaven peopled from earth—by the ministration of angelic visits—by the well-nigh infinite outgoings of grace [*Grosart*].

Reason and Faith. We would represent Reason and Faith as twin-born; the one in form and features the image of manly beauty—the other, of feminine grace and gentleness; but to each of whom, alas! is allotted a sad privation. While the bright eyes of Reason are full of piercing and restless intelligence, his ear is closed to sound; and while Faith has an ear of exquisite delicacy, on her sightless orbs, as she lifts them towards heaven, the sunbeams play in vain. Hand in hand the brother and sister, in all mutual love, pursue their way through a world on which, like ours, day breaks and night falls alternate; by day the eyes of Reason are the guide of Faith, and by night the ear of faith is the guide of Reason. As is wont with those who labour under these privations respectively, Reason is apt to be eager, impetuous, impatient of that instruction which his infirmity will not permit him readily to apprehend; while Faith, gentle and docile, is ever willing to listen to the voice by which alone truth and wisdom can effectually reach her [*Prof. Rogers*].

Sciences, Human. Human sciences are like gaslights in the streets. They serve our purpose only while the heavens are dark. The brighter the sky the more dim and useless they become. When noontide floods the town, they are buried though they burn. No sooner will the sun of absolute truth break on the firmament of our souls, than all the lights of our poor logic shall go out. Knowledge, it shall vanish away [*Dr. Thomas*].

Science only an Agent. We glory in the conquests of science, but we look upon science as merely an *agent*. Science may be a *botanist*, but who started the vital fluid in the veins of the herb and flower? Science may be a *geologist*, but who wrote the rock-covered page, whose hieroglyphics she would translate? Science may be an *astronomer*, but who built the worlds, who projected the comets, whose mysterious path she traces? Science may be an *agriculturist*, she may open the earth's breast and cast in most precious seed, but if the fountains of dew be stayed, science herself will die of *thirst!* Be it observed, then, that science is an *agent*, not a *cause*, and that while we rejoice in its agency, we are bound to acknowledge the goodness of the INFINITE INTELLIGENCE [*Dr. J. Parker*].

Creation. A gentleman, being invited to accompany a distinguished person to see a grand building, erected by Sir Christopher Hatton, desired to be excused and to sit still, looking on a flower he held in his hand, "For," said he, "I see more of God in this flower than in all the beautiful edifices in the world."

Not a flower
But shows some touch, in freckled streak or
stain
Of His unrivalled pencil. He inspires
Their balmy odours, and imparts their hues,
And bathes their eyes with nectar, and includes,
In grains as countless as the seaside sands,
The forms with which He sprinkles all the
earth [*Cowper*].

Creation was Adam's library; God bade him read the interesting volumes of His works, which were designed to make known the Divine character [*Legh Richmond*].

Atheism, Modern. The Atheism of this age is chiefly founded upon the absurd fallacy that the idea of law in Nature excludes the idea of God in Nature. As well might they say the code of Napoleon in France excludes the idea of Napoleon from France. To me, no intuition is clearer than this—that intelligent control everywhere manifests the presence of a ruling mind. To me, physical law, in its permanence, expresses the immutable persistence of His will; in its wise adjustments, the infinite science of His intellect, in its kindly adaptations, the benevolence of His heart [*Coley*].

Reason! Atheism! Whilst expressing sorrow, the thoughtful and pious student of science can hardly refrain from smiling at the extreme deductions of what is called "the Modern School of Philosophy." This modern school has its numerous and divergent theories on the Origin of Nature; but all these diversities have their common root "in the evil heart of unbelief." A system of Metaphysics and Psychology based entirely on the perceptions of the senses, like that of Spencer, Bain, and Mill; a system of Morals recognising no test of duty but public utility in the interest of the race; the natural evolution of Darwin—the Lucretian doctrines of Tyndall—the automatous frogs of Mr. Huxley—the religion of humanity of Congreve and Comte—the lamentations of Gregg over the enigmas of life—and Arnold's last caricature of the Deity, have all a common source. That source is "antagonism to the Cosmogony of the Bible." Their views are the natural growth of a false and shallow philosophy, which excludes from its sphere of vision the very conception of a power *in* Nature, yet ABOVE Nature, and which denies the evidence of the spiritual origin and destiny of our being. To borrow an illustration from a German seer, men see the spinning-wheel but not the spindle, and then declaim against the senseless clatter of the world. We regard them with sorrow, as the disciples of a corrupt and degraded school of thought, who are resolved not to see the bright unfading star of hope—

To quench the only ray that cheered the
earth,
And leave mankind in night which has no
star.

VERSE 2.

Darkness and Deep! Nothing could be more erroneous than the impression that by "deep" is meant the "waters" of v. 6. By "deep" here is meant the fluid surface of the earth—upon which darkness was. But what does the phrase import? Does it mean (1.) Nothing more than a mere negation? or (2.) Something more than a mere negation, *i.e.*, obstruction. AGAIN, was it (*a*) Nothing more than a mere natural obstruc tion? or (*b*) Something more than a mere natural obstruction, *i.e.*, a Satanic struggle to suspend the Divine Creative procedure? This brings up the subtle speculation as to whether Satan had fallen previously to the "deep," when—

. . . . . . What were seas
Unsounded, were of half their waters drained
And what were wildernesses ocean beds;
And mountain ranges, from beneath upheaved,
Clave with their granite peaks primeval plains,
And rose sublime into the water floods.
Floods overflowed themselves with seas of mist,
Which swathed in darkness all terrestrial things,
Once more unfurnished—empty—void, and vast.

Some authors maintain that he had, and that the obstruction was not only "natural," but "angelic"—*i.e.*, that Satan, as the prince of darkness, endeavoured to hinder the great development of Creative Providence. Others have taken up the view that the temptation in Eden was the first overt act of rebellion on Satan's part. If this be so, it is clear that the obstruction was only "natural"—darkness was upon the face of the deep. Whichever is correct, in whole or in part, it seems clear to us that the "darkness" has a double reflection, backwards and forwards: (1.) Light must ever precede ere there can be darkness; and (2.) Darkness must ever be the shadow of coming light, as holding it back. And two things follow upon this:—1. It sweeps away entirely the whole notion that the "light" in v. 3 means "primal origination." Did light exist previous to the Divine fiat in v. 3? It did; for as the Prince of Light existed before the prince of darkness, so did the natural light before the natural darkness. 2. It confirms the view that between vv. 1 and 2 there was a long period (or series) of successive eras of light and darkness, ending in that chaotic gloom of v. 2, which preceded God's recreative command:—

> Such universal chaos reigned without;
> Within, the embryo of a world.

That chaotic gloom was night, figurative of the morning struggle between light and darkness now. There is an endless strife between moral light and darkness. The armies of light and darkness are contending in fierce fight. Darkness is upon the face of the deep; but the night—the moral night—of evil is far spent (Rom. xiii.). The triumph of the prince of darkness and his phalanxes of sin is near its close. The dawn is near. The Divine fiat will soon be heard: "Let there be light;" for at eventide (*i.e.*, our dark hour before the dawn) it shall be light (Zech. xiv. 7). Darkness overtakes not that day, for there shall be no more night (Rev. xxi.); but the Lord shall be the everlasting Light (Isaiah lx. 19). Between the "original creation" of light and the terrestrial era in v. 2 there may have been cycles of millennial days completed.

VERSES 3, 4, and 5.

And God said. How long did the spirit brood over chaos? When did God say, "Let there be light"? Moses does not tell us. He states results, not processes. He brings the thing produced into close proximity with the producing cause. The instrumentality employed, as well as the time engaged, are not mentioned. Man is not forbidden to enquire concerning these; but Moses did not write to gratify such a spirit. He wrote to teach that it was at the bidding of the Almighty *that light dawned*—that the waters retired within the limits assigned to them—that the vast continents and mountain chains lifted their heads—that the flowers looked forth in beauty in the valley; and that the great lights of the firmament took each its station on high, and began to run its appointed course in the heavens. It was by this word—in fine—that the world passed through all its various stages of progress *from chaos to the wondrous scene of order* and beauty which filled the eye of Adam; and the first of these stages of progress was the call to light.

"Let there be light," said God—and forthwith light,
Ethereal first—of things—quintessence pure—
Sprang from the deep, and from her native east
To journey the airy gloom began,
Sphered in a radiant cloud, for yet the sun
Was not; she in a cloudy tabernacle
Sojourned the while [*Milton.*]

All Nature (says a thoughtful mind) is one storehouse of parables to the thoughtful mind. Science, even when most careless, can hardly help stumbling on some of them in its way. But the more carefully we weigh its discourses, the richer we shall find them to be in lessons of wisdom. The links which bind the planets to their sun are not so firm as those which bind the outward world of sense and matter to the higher and nobler truths of the spiritual world. Nature is one vast mirror in which we may see the dim reflection of a nobler field of thought than the conflict of jarring atoms, or integrals of atomic force can ever supply. We need first to gaze downward that presently we may look upward; and turning (says Birks) from the shadows to the substance—from things seen and temporal to the unseen and eternal—may veil our faces before the mission of a greatness that is unsearchable and a goodness that is unspeakable, and in the spirit of Christian faith and hope may gaze on the uncreated light, and rejoice with trembling while we adore.

Light! There is more than sublimity in these words; there is prophecy. As it was in the beginning, so shall it be once again before time shall close. The scene here is a predictive type—a germinal budding (to use Bacon's expression) of the earth's moral regeneration in a future age, both (1.) as to the order in which it was done, and (2.) as to the time it occupied. At present the waters of superstition lie deep on the face of the earth while the spirit has been moving on the space of those waters—the great moral chaos for 6000 years. The Divine voice shall again be heard saying, "Let there be light;" and the light which has struggled ineffectually with the darkness for 6000 years, shall break forth on all sides, and with boundless brilliancy and prevailing power dart its rays to the very ends of the earth, so that the magnificent appeal of the seraphic Isaiah will receive its full consummation: Arise, shine! for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

Of old,
Messiah—riding on the heavens serene—
Sent forth His omnipresent Spirit to brood
Over the troubled deep: then spake aloud,
"Let there be light!"

So shall it as certainly be when the reign of grace has closed—when the brooding of the spirit—for regenerative purposes, has ceased. The Divine Word shall send forth His eternal fiat over the moral and spiritual chaos; and straightway shall at His command,

Light pierce the canopy of surging clouds,
And shoot its penetrative influence through
Their masses. Then shall the broken clouds
Melt into colours as a dream.

Creation! Here we have:—1. The Author; 2. The Order; 3. The Purpose; and 4. The Period of Creation! In all times, and in every heathen land, people have had their thoughts and dreams about the way in which this fair world and yonder bright heavens came to be. One asserts the eternity of matter, another argues that they originated in chance; and both of these rank in wisdom with the quaint explanation of Topsy—that they grew. The Bible clears up all obscurity by declaring that whatever wonders Science may reveal in heaven and earth, the simple truth remains that God created all—not at once, but gradually and progressively: *i.e.*, (1.) from the lowest to the most perfect forms of being, and (2.) during unknown and indefinite periods of time.

God is a God of Order, though to scan
His works may pose the feeble powers of man.

Nowhere do we meet with conflicting plans. All is created in the order of progression. Throughout all Nature, from the earliest zoophyte and seaweed of the Silurian rocks, to the young animals and plants that came into existence to-day—and from the choice gems that were produced when the earth was without form and void, to the crystals which are now forming—one golden chain of harmony links all together, and identifies all as the work of the same Infinite Mind. As Paley says: "We never find traces of a different creator, or the direction of a different will. All appears to have been the work of ONE, more so than appearances in *the most finished machine of human construction;* for—

In human works—though laboured on with pain,
A thousand movements scarce one object gain.
In God's, one single can its end produce,
Yet serves to second, too, some other use.

Darkness and Light! How great is this mystery! And, as the light cast upon a diamond only brings out its beauties, so the light of Science only reveals more and more the mysteries of darkness and light. The prism of late has been unusually rich in new discoveries. The pathway in which Newton took the first main step has been explored anew, and secret marvels have been disclosed in every step of the progress, opening up a wondrous field of beauty in the Divine enquiry: "Knowest thou the pathway of light?" The waves of light, from 4000 to 6000 in one inch—these swift undulations, hundreds of millions of millions in one second, baffle and confound the mind. The beautiful gradation of tint and shade deduced from the pure white of the sunbeam—the strange fusion with heat at one end of the scale, the passage into magnetic force at the other—the dark lines that take their stations, like sentinels, in the midst of LIGHT itself, and turn in other cases into lines of double brightness—all stimulate the curiosity of Science, while they disclose depths of mystery in the Scripture fiat: "Let there be light!"

"Let there be light!" O'er heaven and earth,
The God, Who first the day-beams poured,
Uttered again His fiat forth,
And shed the Gospel's light abroad—
And like the dawn, its cheering rays
On rich and poor were meant to fall,
Inspiring their Redeemer's praise,
In lowly cot and lordly hall.

Light! Biblical criticism and scientific research are more in harmony than ever on the great questions and problems of Genesis. It is McCosh who says that Science and Religion are not opposing citadels, frowning defiance on each other, and their troops brandishing armour in hostile attitude. There was a time when that fratricidal strife was indulged in; but, happily, a change has taken place. Men of science now agree with Herschel that the creation of the world is a subject beyond the range of science; while some are prepared to follow Hugh Miller, when he says that even its present formation is beyond that range. The greater number readily accept the definition of Chalmers—that Nature is the handmaid of Revelation, and that it is for Nature's students to aid her in washing the hands and feet of Revelation as she struggles against principles of atheism and sin. As the students of Nature, men of science, while maintaining that the truths of Revelation do not inform them of the deductions of Physical Science, as strongly assert (1.) that the study of Nature teaches not the truths of Revelation; though (2.) that it does confirm and illustrate those truths. This is especially the case with reference to Gen. i., and notably of the statements as to "LIGHT." These statements have been held up to ridicule—have been treated with contempt—have been pounded with the scientific mortar mercilessly—have been flung into the crucible of human intellect, set over a fire of scientific knowledge, heated sevenfold; with what result? The account as to "light" has been found to harmonize in every point with the ascertained deductions of Natural Science. The great difficulty was: "How could light be before the sun?" All perplexity has disappeared, as autumn mists before the glorious orb of day. Science has discovered that light is not conditioned by perfected luminous bodies, but that light bodies are conditions of a preceding luminous element: *i.e.*, that light could exist before the sun. Did it so exist in Gen. i.?—Revelation alone can tell. Some assert (1.) that the sun did not exist till the fourth day, and that the light sufficed for all plants previously formed; others declare (2.) that the sun did exist, but that his light was retarded by the mists and exhalations. It matters not, therefore, whether that light (1.) emanated from a luminous element—a sea of subtle and elastic ether—

> "Immense, imponderable, luminous,
> Which—while revealing other things—re[illegible]
> Itself invisible, impalpable,
> Pervading space;"

or (2.) undulated from a luminous body; whether that light (1.) was independent of the sun, or (2.) came through mists from the sun. It is, however, worthy of notice that the Hebrew makes a definite distinction between the light of the first and that of the fourth day, from which distinction it is not unreasonable to infer that there is no necessary connection between light and luminousness: *i.e.*, that luminaries are after all only a concentration of particles of light previously existing as light.

Heaven! Ver. 8. Look above you, and in the over-arching firmament read the truth of an all-pervading Providence. "Yon sky," says Gill, "is God's outspread hand, and the glittering stars are the jewels on the fingers of the Almighty." Do you not see that His hand closes round you on all sides? you cannot go where universal love shines not! As Luther remarked: "I was at my window, and saw the stars, and the sky, and that vast and glorious firmament in which the Lord has placed them. I could nowhere discover the columns on which the Master has supported His immense vault, and yet the heavens did not fall. I beheld thick clouds hanging above us like a vast sea, and I could perceive neither ground on which they reposed, nor cords by which they were suspended, and yet they did not fall upon us. Why? Because

> "There is a power,
> Unseen, that rules the illimitable world,
> That guides its motion from the brightest star
> To the least dust of this sin-tainted mould."
> *Thomson.*

Mountains! Ver. 9. Fancy the mountains brought down to the level of a uniform plane. Conceive no peaks soaring aloft into the regions of perpetual snow—no declivities, leading the wanderer in a few hours from Arctic colds to the genial mildness of an Italian sky. Picture no precipitous streams, whose foaming waters as they bound along first reflect the dark pine in their crystal mirror, then the sturdy oak, then the noble chestnut, or the graceful laurel. How monotonous would be the landscape! how uniform the character of organic life over vast tracts of country, where new vegetation—thanks to the perpetual changes of elevation and aspect of the soil—is seen revelling in endless multiplicity of forms. But what if earth

> "Be but the shadow of heaven, and things therein,
> Each to other like, more than on earth is thought."

Land and Water! Ver. 10. The actual distribution of sea and land over the surface of the globe is of the highest importance to the present condition of organic life. As Hartwig asserts, if the ocean were considerably smaller, or if Asia and America were concentrated within the tropics, the tides—the oceanic currents—and the meteorological phenomena, on which the existence of the vegetable and animal kingdoms depend, would be so profoundly modified, that it is extremely doubtful whether man could have existed. It is absolutely certain that he could never have risen to a high degree of civilization. But now nations, by means of commerce and missionary enterprise, are holding communion with nations and mutually enriching each other by the stores of knowledge, experience, and religious education which they have each accumulated apart. Christianity is rapidly melting the separate nationalities into one; but the fusion of these discordant elements into one glorious harmony—pure as sunlight—inspiring as a strain of music—will never be accomplished until the Son of God shall come in the clouds of heaven to set His throne upon the borders of the sea of glass mingled with fire—

> "And on that joyous shore
> Our lightened hearts shall know
> The life of long ago;
> The sorrow-burdened past shall fade for evermore."

Flowers! Ver. 11. A pleasant writer tells of a Texas gentleman who had the misfortune to be an unbeliever. One day he was walking in the woods reading the writings of Plato. He came to where the great writer uses the great phrase, "Geometrizing." He thought to himself, "If I could only see plan and order in God's works, I could be a believer." Just then he saw a little "Texas star" at his feet. He picked it up, and thoughtlessly began to count its petals. He found there were five He counted the stamens, and there were five of them. He counted the divisions at the bas of the flower, and there were five of them. He then set about multiplying these three fives to see how many chances there were of a flower being brought into existence without the aid of mind, and having in it these three fives. The chances against it were one hundred and twenty-five to one. He thought that was very strange. He examined another flower, and found it the same. He multiplied one hundred and twenty-five by itself to see how many chances there were against there being two flowers, each having these exact relations of numbers. He found the chances against it were thirteen thousand six hundred and twenty-five to one. But all around him there were multitudes of these little flowers; they had been growing and blooming there for years. Now, he thought, this shows the order of intelligence; the mind that has ordained it is GOD. And so he shut up his book, and picked up the little flower, and kissed it, and exclaimed, "Bloom on, little flowers; sing on, little birds; you have a God, and I have a God; the God that made these little flowers made me."

> Your voiceless lips, O flowers, are living
> preachers;
> Each cup a pulpit—every leaf a book."
> —*Longfellow.*

Flowers! Ver. 12. Nothing can equal the immense variety of flowers—their charming colours—or their delicious fragrance. Without the flowers, the variety of perfumes which regale our sense of smell would be but small; without them its faculties of enjoyment would not have harmonized with the outer world. Those who have studied most about flowers reckon that there are about 80,000 different kinds already known. An English gentleman, who was travelling in Persia lately, says that on one occasion he was invited into the garden to breakfast, where the flowers were so numerous that a great pile of rose-leaves was heaped up for a table before each guest. A carpet was laid over each pile. Cleopatra, the beautiful but profligate queen of Egypt, made a very poor use of the flowers which God in His goodness has caused to grow for our pleasure, when she wanted to give a splendid feast to Antony, the great Roman general, she procured roses enough to cover the floor of the large dining hall three feet thick all over; mats were then spread over the floor, and the guests sat down to feast. This was a pitiful return to Him who has

> "Mantled the green earth with flowers,
> Linking our hearts to nature!"—*Hemans.*

Nature! Ver. 12. When we see a cottage with honeysuckle and roses twined round its porch, and bright flowers trained in its windows and growing in its little garden plot in front, it is a sign to us, says one, that the evils of poverty are unknown in that home—that the inmates are raised above the fear of want—and that, having the necessary food and raiment provided for them, the head of the home is at leisure and liberty to devote his care to the simple pleasures of natural life. And so, when we see in this great house—this earth of ours—bright flowers growing in every window and doorway, and associated with all the uses of domestic economy, we cannot but regard the circumstance as a proof that the great Householder attends both to the lower and to the higher wants of His family. In other words, if God has provided the superfluities of nature—*i.e.*, flowers—it is a pledge and guarantee that He will provide the things which are necessary—that, in fact, food and raiment shall not be wanting.

> "Heart, that cannot, for cares that press,
> Sing with the bird, or thy Maker bless
> As the flowers may, blooming sweet,
> With never an eye but God's to greet
> Their beauty and freshness, learn to trust!
> Lift thy thought from the earthy dust!

Flower-lessons! Ver. 13. An old woman lived in a cottage, and had long been confined to her bed with sickness. Near her lived a little girl, whose mother was very poor, and had little to give to her stricken neighbour. The maiden had a geranium which some one had given to her. It grew in a flower-pot in the window; and when it bore flowers, both mother and daughter found sweet pleasure in watching their bloom developing. The little girl plucked the nicest of these blossoms, and carried it to the sick woman, who was lying in her bed, suffering great pain. In the afternoon a lady called, and observed the beautiful geranium flower in an old broken tumbler on a little stand by the old woman's bed. "That flower makes me think what a wonderful God we have; and if a flower like this is not too little for Him to make and take care of, I am sure He will not forget a poor creature like me." During the great Manchester cotton-famine some years ago there was much distress, and many were in a state of starvation. Among them was an aged couple, who sold everything that could be turned into bread. They could not, however, sell a beautiful flower which they had in a flower-pot; so that they lived in an empty room, with only this gem of nature. "That flower has been such a comfort to us in all our trouble; for when we look at it morning after morning, it seems to preach to us all the time, and to tell us of trust in God." Yes, God sent them

> "To comfort man—to whisper hope,
> Where'er his faith is dim;
> For He who careth for the flowers,
> Will care much more for him."—*Howitt.*

God in Nature! Ver. 14. The heavens declare the glory of God. But not the heavens ONLY. There are many sources whence we may derive some faint glimpse of the divine glory. Yet we must be inside to see clearly. Standing within a cathedral, and looking through its stained and figured windows *towards* the light, we behold the forms and colours by the light. Standing outside an gazing at the same windows, we see nothing but blurred and indistinct enamelling. And so we must stand within the temple-pile of nature if we would see the glaring hues of divine glory, especially in the outburstings of noontide splendour, in the silent pomp of the noiseless night, in the moon walking in her brightness like some fair spirit wading through the opposing clouds of adversity in the starry garden of the firmament, those flowers of the sky budding with hopes of immortality. Thus worshipping reverently within nature's cathedral, we see that

"The heavens are a point from the pen of His
perfection;
The world is a rosebud from the bower of His
beauty;
The sun is a spark from the light of His
wisdom."—*Sir Wm. Jones.*

Sun! Ver. 15. Dr. Hayes, the arctic explorer, graphically describes the return of the sun after an absence of long cold months. For several days the golden flush deepens until the burning forehead of the "King of Day" rises above the horizon to circle round it half the year. The inexpressible delight with which the morning glory is hailed almost makes one cease to wonder that the sun has had devout worshippers.—

"Most glorious orb! thou wert a worship, ere
The mystery of thy making was revealed!
Thou earliest minister of the Almighty,
Which gladdened, on their mountain tops, the
hearts
Of the Chaldean shepherds, till they poured
Themselves in orisons."—*Byron.*

Sun and Moon! Ver. 15. We consider the sun the type of Christ, and the moon as the type of the Church. It is remarkable that at the crucifixion the sun was obscured, and the moon was at the full. But though she has suffered many an eclipse, yet like the moon the Church of Christ emerges from them all by keeping on her path of obedience:—

"And still that light upon the world
Its guiding splendour throws;
Bright in the opening hours of life,
But brighter at its close."—*Peabody.*

Tides! Ver. 16. The influences of the Holy Spirit upon the life of the Christian Church has been likened to that of the moon upon our earth. The return of the tide twice every day is owing to the attractive influence which the moon exerts upon our world, and especially upon its great movable fluid the ocean. What a mysterious page of nature does this fact open, when we thus behold ourselves linked as it were with a distant world by an invisible chain figure that wonderful power by which the life of the Church and her true members is kept *motion, purity and holiness!* Well may that moon be called the "Queen of Heaven"—

"Who, from her maiden face
Shedding her cloudy locks, looks meekly forth,
And with her virgin stars walks in the heaven;
Walks nightly there, conversing as she walks
Of purity, and holiness, and God."—Pollok.

Starlight. Ver. 16. Those bright and beautiful stars are witnesses for God. They tell us that He is—that He is very great and good. This was the impression upon the mind of a man of God in the olden time, when he sang how the heavens proclaim the glory of God. Not many years ago, during the terrible French Revolution, when godless men murdered their king and princes in France, an attempt was made to obliterate all trace of God. Bibles were burnt, churches were shut up, sabbaths were abolished, and Christians were cruelly slain. One of these revolutionists accosted a pious countryman with the jaunty assurance that he was going to pull down the "village church" in order that there "might be nothing left to remind you of God or religion." To this the pious peasant responded, "Then you will have to blot out the stars, which are older than our church tower, much higher up in the sky—beyond your reach." Yes, it is not the unwearied sun only which displays the Creator's power, it is not the man only which publishes to every land the work of an Almighty hand; but—

"All the stars that round her burn,
And all the planets in their turn,
Confirm the tidings as they roll,
And spread the truth from pole to pole"
—*Addison.*

Sunlight! Ver. 17. There is a good story told about a certain missionary and the sun. He was talking one day with a heathen man, who said:—"I go to the place where you worship, but I never see your God." The missionary, stepping out of the house into the open air, bathed in the brilliant beauty of the noontide sun, pointed up to it, and said to the enquirer, "Look at yonder sun." The man tried to look but instantly turned away his face, and covered his eyes with his hands, exclaiming, "It blinds me." And the man of God quickly responded by telling him that yon sun was but one of the numerous retinue of his God, and stationed merely on the outside of God's palace. "If you cannot bear to look at one of His servants, how can you expect to see the master of that servant—the great God who made him."

"God spake, and on the new-dressed earth
Soft smiled the glowing sun,
Then full of joy he sprung aloft,
His heavenly course to run."—
Krumacher.

Sun-Rule! Ver. 18. The sun is like the father of a family with his children gathered round him. A good father always governs his children well; and the better they are governed, the happier and more useful they will be. The sun is such a father—governing well those different worlds which are like children about him. He keeps them all in the places which God wants them to be in, and at the same time he sees that they are all going round—each in his own path, just as God wants them to do. This power he enjoys from God. Through Him

"His beams the sea-girt earth array,
King of the sky, and father of the day."
—*Logan.*

Sun-Good! Ver. 18. The sun is the fountain of light to this lower world. Day by day it rises on us with its gladdening beams. All nature seems to own its influence, both for light, heat, faithfulness, and beauty. Christ is, says Trower, to the moral world, what the sun is to the natural world—the source of life and loveliness, health and happiness. He rises with healing in His wings—scatters the mists of ignorance and sin—calls forth the fruits of righteousness—and arrays them in splendour, outrivalling the brilliant beams of the rainbow. And as the natural sun retains his strength undimmed though ages have rolled past, so the Divine Sun remains at His sacred, high, eternal noon. And

"As the sun
Doth spread his radiance through the fields of air,
And kindle in revolving stars his blaze,
He pours upon their hearts the splendour of His rays."—*Upham.*

Moonlight! Ver. 18. All the beauty of the moon is but the reflection of the glory of the sun. She has no light of her own, and shines only by reflecting or giving away the light which she receives from the dazzling orb of day. When a piece of looking-glass is held in the sunshine, it causes a bright light to dance about on the opposite wall. This is exactly what the moon does; she catches the beams of light which it receives from the sun, and throws them down. The moon hangs in the sky, and becomes as much like the sun as it can by reflecting the light which that orb gives it; just so when we become Christians, we not only learn to love Jesus, but try to be like Him. And when we do this we are reflecting the light that Jesus gives us; just as the moon, the queen of the midnight hour, and for ever beautiful, softly and silently pours

"Her chasten'd radiance on the scene below;
And hill, and dale, and tower
Drink the pure flood of light."—*Neele.*

Two Suns! Ver. 19. There is this difference between the Sun of Righteousness and that in the sky—that, whereas the latter by his presence eclipses all his satellite-attendants, the Former, though radiant with a much brighter splendour, will *by His presence* impart glory to His saints. When Christ, who is our Life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory. So that the saints are not like stars which the sunshine obscures and makes to disappear; but they are, as Boyle defines it, like polished silver, or those vaster balls of burnished brass upon the cathedral dome which shine the more they are shone upon, and which derive their glittering brightness from the sun's refulgent beams

"Made hereby apter to receive
Perfection from the Sun's most potent ray."

Animal Life! Ver. 20. There is a meaning in these words which is seldom noticed: for innumerable millions of animalculæ are found in water. Eminent naturalists have discovered no less than 30,000 in a single drop. How inconceivably small, remarks Professor Green, must each be; and yet each a perfect animal—furnished with the whole apparatus of bones, muscles, nerves, lungs, etc. What a proof is this of the manifold wisdom of God! If we pluck a flower from the garden on which rests the glistening dewdrop; if we sink our finger in a pond, and then examine with a microscope, we shall find worlds living and moving in its drops; if we sail on the ocean at midnight, our vessel may be enveloped in a flame of bright phosphorescent light, and gleaming with a greenish lustre—attributable to the presence of innumerable multitudes of animals floating on the waves:—

"Flash'd the dipt oars, and, sparkling with the stroke,
Around the waves phosphoric brightness broke."—*Byron.*

Mr. Charles Darwin paints in vivid colours the magnificent spectacle presented by the sea, while sailing in the latitudes of Cape Horn on a dark night. It is now no longer a matter of doubt that many of the inferior marine animals possess the faculty of secreting a luminous matter. And when we consider their countless numbers, we need not wonder at the magnificent effects produced by such tiny creatures, whose

"Vivid light
To the dark billows of the night,
A blooming splendour give."—*Scott.*

Birds! Ver. 21. A little bird alighted at sunset on the bough of a pear tree that grew in Luther's garden. Luther looked upon it, and said, "That little bird covers its head with its wings, and will sleep there, so still and fearless, though over it are the infinite starry spaces, and the great blue depths of immensity; yet it fears not; it is at home; the God that made it, too, is there."

"There sitteth a dove so white and fair,
All on the lily spray,
And she listeneth when to our Saviour dear
The little children pray."—*Bremer.*

Creatures of God! Ver. 24. One day a boy was tormenting a kitten, whereupon his little sister—with her eyes suffused in tears—exclaimed, "Oh! do not hurt what is *God's* kitten." That word of the little girl was not lost; for a word fitly spoken—*i.e.*, a word set on wheels—how good it is. The boy ceased to torment God's creature, but he could not leave off thinking about what his sister had said. The next day, on his way to school, he met one of his companions most mischievously beating a poor, half-starved dog: "Don't do that to God's creature." The boy looked ashamed, and tried to excuse himself by saying that the dog had stolen his dinner. But a poor drunkard passing heard the expression, and said within himself, "I, too, am God's creature; I will arise, and go to my Father." All are then God's creatures!

> "Here on the hills He feeds His herds,
> His flocks on yonder plains;
> His praise is warbled by the birds;
> Oh! could we catch their strains."
> —*Montgomery.*

All Things! Ver. 25. Some men have the power of attending to several things at once. Napoleon the Great had the power of keeping six men engaged in writing letters for him at the same time, and this was thought a wonderful feat. It was remarkable, and very few men could do it; but it was nothing to what God does every day. Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty. He keeps all things in life:

> "Lord, thou art great! In Nature's every form;
> Greater in none, simply most great in all;
> In fears and terrors, sunshine, smile and storm,
> And all that stirs the heart, is felt Thy call.—*Seidel.*

Man! Ver. 25. There is a beautiful propriety in the Bible commencing with the creation of the heavens and the earth. The account of this magnificent scene serves as a portico to the august Temple of Truth. It is a kind of outer court, and the wonders which we here behold prepare us for the glories which beautify the inner temple. But in the hands of Moses this theme, mighty as it is, is only the introduction to others still mightier. He does not detain us in the outer court, but leads us straight to the gates of the Temple. By the Divine Word the world passed through all its various stages in its progress from chaos to the wondrous scene of order and beauty, when, in v. 25, God saw that it was good. "How in the household," writes Beecher, "are garments quilted and wrought, and curiously embroidered, and the softest things laid aside, and the cradle prepared to greet the little pilgrim of love when it comes from distant regions, we know not whence! Creation was God's cradle for Adam—curiously carved and decorated, flower-strewn and star-curtained." As Milton says: "There wanted yet the master-work, the end of all yet done: so God took

> "Some handfuls of the dust, and moulded it
> Within His plastic hands until it grew
> Into an image like His own, like ours,
> Of perfect symmetry, divinely fair,
> But lifeless, till He stoop'd and breathed therein
> The breath of life."

Temple-Man! Ver. 26. It has been carefully noted that our Lord was the first who applied to the human body a term previously employed to denote a building consecrated to God. His example was followed by St. Paul, with whom the expression was a familiar and favourite one. And yet, strange to say, this symbolism fell into abeyance during all the Christian centuries. The body was treated with neglect or contempt. It was regarded as the drag and prison house of the soul; so that even Trench writes:—

> "Plumage which man shatters in his rage,
> And with his *prison* doth vain war engage.

We represent it as the cause of all the moral failures and intellectual weaknesses of mankind. By the ascetic it has been mortified and tortured in every way. By the philosopher it has been ignored, so that Sir William Hamilton inscribed in golden letters upon the wall of his class-room the singular sentiment: "In man there's nothing great but mind." It is true that man's body was formed out of the dust, and that thus it is the same as the forms of the mineral, vegetable, and animal creations. As Oken says, the whole animal world is repeated and represented in man, the animal kingdom is man broken up into fragments. But human nature is not, therefore, to be despised; for though the human body takes all nature into it, it does so to make it a temple for the worship and service of God. And that God designed such a view of the human frame is evident from the fact of the incarnation. Jesus entered the human body and purified it of his indwelling, making it a palace for the divine glory and a shrine for the divine worship.

Man's Spirit! Ver. 27. As a missionary in India was catechizing the children of his school, a Brahmin interrupted him by saying that the spirit of man and the spirit of God were one. In order to show him the absurdity of such a declaration, the missionary called upon the boys to refute it by stating the difference between the spirit of man and God. They readily, so Arvine says, gave the following answers:—The spirit of man is created; God is its creator. The spirit of man is full of sin; God is a pure spirit. The spirit of man is subject to grief; God is incapable of suffering. Therefore, they can never be one. And yet the spirit of the one dwells in the spirit of the other. This is a great mystery:—

> "And when the dread enigma presseth sore,
> Thy patient voice saith: 'Watch with me one hour;'
> As sinks the moaning river in the sea,
> In silver peace, so sinks my soul in Thee."
> *Howe.*

Man! Ver. 27. As the ancients kept their temples pure and undefiled, so we should preserve our "bodies" free from all unholy words and actions. In some of the heathen temples, the Vestals cherished a flame on their altar perpetually. So should we maintain the flame of truth on the altars of our hearts. Within their temple walls were their helpless deities, and there thronged the myriads of votaries to pay homage and worship. We should worship the Father, and cultivate the companionship of the Holy Ghost in our bodies.

Apex! Ver. 29. As Agassiz points out, it is evident that there is a manifest progress in the succession of beings on the surface of the earth. This progress consists in an increasing similarity to the living fauna, and among the vertebrates, especially in their increasing resemblance to man. But this connection is not the consequence of a direct lineage between the fauna of different ages. The link by which creation is connected is of a high and immaterial nature; and their connection is to be sought in the view of the Creator Himself, whose aim in forming the earth was to introduce man upon the surface of our globe. Man is the end towards which all the animal creation has tended from the first appearance of the first Palæozoic fishes. When all was complete—

"A creature of a more exalted kind
Was wanting yet, and then was man designed;
Conscious of thought, of more capacious breast,
For empire formed, and fit to rule the rest."
Ovid.

Divine Gifts! Ver. 29. As the artist delights in exercising his talent in depicting the landscape—as the poet finds pleasure in creating, out of human experiences and the bright scenes of nature, a new world of beauty and passion, so God—the Great Artist and Poet—delights in the scenes and objects of nature, in the formation of which He has exercised His Divine skill and power; and to this Divine feeling the Son of God gave frequent expression. He revealed to us His own most perfect understanding and enjoyment of the beauty of nature—how God regarded the creation which He had pronounced to be very good. But they were formed for *man's* special enjoyment. The great whole world—to use the figure of an eminent writer—is decked with beauty for man's pleasure. Beautiful is the lily-work that forms the capitals of its stony and massive pillars; rich is the flowerage that adorns its barge-laden streams, which bear up and along the works of life. Everything that is useful to man has some bright and beautiful thing connected with it, which, like the settling of a brilliant butterfly upon the open page of a dreary tome, or the falling of a rosy gleam upon some homely task, seems to speak of the fact that this verse is true—

"Our cup runneth over, our life is so bright,
So brimming with mercy and love,
It seems just a springtime of sunshine and light,
Blest foretastes of better above."

God! Ver. 31. His works proclaim His being, power, wisdom, goodness. Some years ago there was a German prince, a good christian man, who lived in a fine old castle on the banks of the Rhine. He had a son, who was beloved by all around for his princely virtues; and on one occasion, while he was absent from home, a French gentleman became the nobleman's guest. This visitor did not believe in God, and never thought of trusting to Him for anything. One day, when the baron and his friend were conversing, he said something which grieved the baron very much, and led him to exclaim: "Are you not afraid to offend God by speaking in such a way?" But the Frenchman replied that he had never seen God, knew nothing of Him, cared nothing for Him. His host remained silent, and resolved to seize the first opportunity afforded him of shewing to his guest the fallacy of his reasoning. So the next morning he conducted the doubter around his castle and grounds to see many beauties. Amongst other things he showed him some very beautiful pictures, which the visitor admired, and of which the prince said: "These are my son's." The garden had been chastely and magnificently laid out by his son. The cottages in the village, all neatly and substantially built, had been designed by his son. When the gentleman had seen all, he exclaimed: "What a happy man you must be to have such a son;" but the prince abruptly enquired how he knew that he had so good a son? "By his works," was the response. "But you have not seen him." "No; but I know him very well, because I judge of him by his works." God's works teach us:

"And every wild and hidden dell,
Where human footsteps never trod,
Is wafting songs of joy which tell
The praises of their Maker—God!

Creation Good! Ver. 31. Did that goodness which Jehovah saw evidence itself in the joy of universal adoration? For after all, is there not joy in every aspect of Nature? Could Adam not see it; could Jehovah himself not see this joy of goodness in the purity of virgin morning, in the sombre grey of a day of clouds, in the solemn pomp and majesty of night? Was it not visible in the chaste lines of the crystal, the waving outlines of distant hills, the minute petals of the fringed daisy, or the overhanging form of Eden's mysterious glades? Could Jehovah not say in even deeper grandeur, sense, and force, than Adam,

"What throbbings of deep joy
Pulsate through all I see; from the full bud
Whose unctuous sheath is glittering in the moon,
Up through the system of created things,
Even to the flaming ranks of seraphim."
Alford.

CHAPTER II.

Critical Notes.—2. Rested] "Kept sabbath," *i.e.* "observed a sacred, festive quiet." A good worker does his work well, and leaves off when he has done. The very crown of his work is the pleasure he takes in it when complete. Such is God's rest; and hence He graciously seeks for intelligent companionship therein: Heb. iii.-iv. **3. Created and made**] "Made creatively, *i.e.*, perh. by making it anew out of chaos" (Dav.). **4. Generations**] Heb. "births"= "birth-facts," "birth-stages"="genesis:" Sept., "This is the book of the genesis," &c. **Lord God**] Heb. Jehovah Elohim. The correct pronunciation of J. is prob. Yahweh; formed of the 3 sing. mas. imperf. Hiphil, of *hawah*, "to be," or rather "to become," "to come to pass;" and therefore meaning, "He causes to become," "He brings to pass;" "The Fulfiller." This explanation (1.) altogether removes the difficulty from Ex. vi., since God was known to Ab., Is., and Ja. rather as Promiser than as Fulfiller; (2.) puts a most pertinent force into the name as Israel's encouragement to leave Eg. for Canaan, Ex. iii.; (3.) invests innumerable passages with a most striking beauty, *e.g.*, Ps. xxiii. 1, "J.—the Fulfiller—is my Shepherd: I shall not want;" (4.) provides for the occasional application of the name to the Messiah, as in Is. xl. 10, 11, cf. John x., Is. vi. cf. John xii. 41; and (5.) by bringing out the gracious covenant power of this name, furnishes some clue to the reason (or *feeling*) leading to its omission in some cases (as in ch. iii. 1-5, Job iii.-xxxvii., Ps. xix. 1-6, cxix. 15) and its insertion in others (Gen. ii. and fol., Job. i.-ii. xxxviii.-xlii. Ps. xix. 7-14). To dwell for a moment on the opening of Gen., how natural that in the first sec. (i. 1—ii. 3) the name Elohim should suffice, but that when man is to stand out in his moral relation to his Creator, in sec. second (ii. 4, etc.), Jehovah Elohim should be employed. And surely it speaks a volume that neither the serpent, nor the woman under the shadow of entertained temptation, should care to utter a name so replete with grace and love. The name J. occurs about 7,500 times in O. T. **7. Breath**] Heb. *neshamah*, nearly=*ruach*, spirit (cf. Eccl. xii. 7), occurs only in ch. vii. 22, Deut. xx. 16, Jos. x. 40, xi. 11, 14, 2 Sam. xxii. 16, 1 Ki. xv. 29, xvii. 17, Job iv. 9, xxvi. 4, xxvii. 3, xxxii. 8, xxxiii. 4, xxxiv. 14, xxxvii. 10, Ps. xviii. 15, cl 6, Is. ii. 22, xxx. 33, xlii. 5, lvii. 16, Dan. x. 17. The study of these will richly repay. **Life**] Heb. *chayyim*, prop. "lives," or still better, "living ones," hence, by abstraction "the condition peculiar to living ones" = "life." Cf. on Elohim ch. i. 1. The use of the Heb. pl. as an abstract has received too little notice (Ges. Gr. § 108, 2. a.; Ewald, Gr. § 179). **Living Soul**] That is, soul became the characteristic of his being. Hence he is denominated from that wh. is prominent in him; as the glorified Christ is called "a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. xv. 45), without making him all spirit or destroying the distinction between body and spirit. Soul lives, spirit makes alive: this is the teaching of Scripture. Our present body is a psychical body, our future b. will be a pneumatical b. Little by little we may hope to build up a "biblical psychology;" *i.e.*, if we are willing both to learn and to unlearn just as truth may demand. Cf. C. N. on ch. i. 20. **14. East of Assyria**] So Ges. and Dav. Lit., "before A." wh. to a writer in Pal. is = west (Fürst). **17. Surely die**] Heb. "die, die shalt thou;" as in ver. 16 "eat, eat shalt thou," iii. 16, "increase, increase will I:"—"a frequent and quite peculiar idiom for the indication of emphasis" (Ewald). Dying thou shalt die" is misleading, has in fact misled many into groundless subtleties. **18. Help meet**] Prob. "according to his front" (Dav.) or "corresponding to him" (Ges., Fürst, Dav.). **19. To see what He would call them**] Or: "that he [Adam] might see what he should call them." Either rendering is valid. **21. Deep sleep**] Sept. *extasis* = "trance." **23. This**] An exclamation of joyful satisfaction. Prob. no Eng. trans. can give out the striking threefold repetition of the feminine pronoun *zoth*: "This (fem.)—now—is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: this (fem.) shall be called Woman; because out of Man was she taken—this (fem.)" **Woman**] Heb. ,*ishah*, fem. of '*ish*. **Man**] Heb. '*ish*: perh. a prim. word (Ges. Dav.); but more probably = strong (Fürst, Dav.):—to be distinguished from ,*âdhâm* ("Adam," "man") as Lat. *vir* from *homo*, and Gr. *anêr* from *anthropos*. This distinction, with the idioms growing out of it, will be found worth constant attention.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—3

The Divine Sabbath.

The Divine Artificer with intelligence and delight completes his work. In the calm majesty of His repose He contemplates it. What a scene must have spread before his eye! The created minds who could comprehend but a part, would be overwhelmed at the splendour, variety, and order. How perfect must it have shone forth before the Divine eye that saw all arrangements, and knew the relations of the universe! As none but He could paint such a picture, so He must have been alone in his delight. This was God's Sabbath. See in it:—

I. The Divine completion of His creative work. "The heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them." The Bible teaches that creation ended with the sixth day's work. As it was itself a series of separate, distinct acts, so in itself the series was complete. According to this cosmogony there were no further creations. *Individuals* may be *born* and die. According to the laws impressed upon the vegetable and the animal worlds there may be the development of the individual from the parent, but it will be after the parent's kind. Races and species may die, become extinct; but, if so, they go to a grave whence there is no resurrection. Whatever may be the truth underlying the words of the ancient record, it certainly is not development of species, either by natural or any other selection. Science and Bible are not opposed, but the peculiar form of the present day's theory is not that of the Scriptures. This fact is in harmony with:—1. *The disclosures of science in its history of the earth's crust.* The evidence, as yet, is beyond comparison in favour of no resurrection of an extinct species, nor post-Adamic creation of a new species. 2. *The history of the world as the record of moral and religious special acts on the part of God.* Human history is not that of a physical world. Events since the creation have ethical meaning. The theatre for the great drama of human life was completed in creation. Since that God's action has been the working out of the successive scenes. 3. *The brief references in the other sacred writings to the physical activity of the Creator.* He is not represented as creative, but as destroying, and purifying by fire. Thus we find corroborative evidence that Divine interference in the physical world is not in the form of creation.

II. The Divine contemplation of His creative work. At the close of His work all things pass before the eye of God. Everything was now *complete.* Everything was in *subordination.* Everything was ready for the higher and more glorious exercise of the divine activity in providence and grace. All was prepared for the kingdom of probation, by which the last created of the world was to be tried, disciplined, and perfected. We may learn here:—1. *Evil has no natural place in the universe.* 2. *Matter is not necessarily hostile to God.* The Bible, in this picture of Divine contemplation, cuts away the ground from certain forms of false religion and philosophy. Divine life is not the destruction of matter, nor the rising out of the region of the sensuous; but so restoring the harmony, that God may again look upon the world, and say it is "very good." 3. *The present condition of things, so changed from that which God first looked upon, must be the result of some catastrophe.*

III. The Divine Rest after His Creative Work. The rest began when the work was done. The contemplation was a part of the Sabbatic blessedness. The Sabbath: 1. *It was a season of rest.* It does not imply that there was weariness, but cessation from creative activity. 2. *The rest was blessed by God.* As He saw His work good, so He saw His rest good. 3. *There was an appointment of a similar blessed rest for His creatures.* "He sanctified the seventh day." It is not for us to discuss the relations of God to labour and repose. The fact may be beyond our comprehension. It has lessons for us:—1. *There is a place and time for rest.* 2. *The condition on which rest may be claimed is that men work.* 3. *This rest should be happy.* Much of the modern idea of a Sabbath is not that which God would say was blessed. The Sabbath is not a time of gloom. 4. *This rest should be religious.* 5. *This rest is unlimited to any particular portion of the race.* (*Homilist.*)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1—3. The Sabbath:—1. A day of rest. 2. A day for contemplation. 3. A day of peculiar sanctity. 4. A day Divinely set apart for the moral good of man.

The Sabbath:—1. Its antiquity. 2. Its utility. 3. Its prophecy.

The finished Creation:—1. Should attract our attention. 2. Should excite our admiration. 3. Should evoke our praise. 4. Should lead us to God.

The "*host*" of them:—1. As an army Creation is large. 2. It is orderly. 3 It is independent. 4. It is triumphant. 5. It is well commanded. 6. Let no man be found in conflict with its laws.

Were finished:—1. The work of God is progressive. 2. Concentrated. 3. Productive of result. 4. Completive. 5. Learn to finish the good works we commence, to bring them to perfection.

The Sabbath:—1. Just in its command. 2. Beneficial in its results. 3. Imperative in its delegation.

Though God ceased from His works of creation, He ceaseth not from His work of Providence.

The worship of God ought to be man's first care.

God desires His Sabbath to be sanctified:—1. By secret communion. 2. By study of the Scriptures. 3. By public worship.

The law of the Sabbath:—1. Beneficial. 2. Universal. 3. Perpetual.

Rest:—1. Not indolence. 2. Not culpable. 3. It should be contemplative. 4. It should be sacred. 5. It is Divinely warranted.

Absolute and perfect is the frame of heaven and earth, as it cometh out of the hand of God.

Jehovah hath His hosts in heaven and earth, many and mighty.

God's hosts should keep order in every part, and be subject to their Lord.

The seventh day bringeth God's perfect work to the well-being of creation.

The seventh day is God's creature.

God rested from creation of kinds, not from propagation and providence.

Reasons for the Sabbath:—1. God's rest. 2. God's blessing. 3. God's contemplation. 4. God's sanctification.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 4—7.

THE WORLD WITHOUT A MAN.

The text suggests three thoughts:—I. The world's independency of man. The terraqueous globe, embosomed in those wonderful heavens, and filled with every species of vegetable and animal life, existed before man appeared. 1. *The world can do without him.* The heavens would be as bright, the earth as beautiful, the waves of the ocean as sublime, the song of the birds as sweet; were man no more. 2. *He cannot do without the world.* He needs its bright skies, and flowing rivers, and productive soil, &c. He is the most dependent of all creatures. The text suggests:—II. The world's incompleteness without man. Without man the world would be a school without a pupil, a theatre without a spectator, a mansion without a resident, a temple without a worshipper. Learn from this subject:—1. *The lesson of adoring gratitude to the Creator.* Adore Him for the fact, the capabilities, and the sphere of your existence. 2. *The lesson of profound humility.* The world can do without thee, my brother; has done without thee; and will do without thee. The text suggests:—III. The world's claims upon man. "The earth He hath given to the children of men." The nature of this gift proclaims the obligation of the receiver. 1. *The world is filled with material treasures; develop and use them.* 2. *The world is fertile with moral lessons; interpret and apply them.* 3. *The world is filled with the presence of God; walk reverently* [*Homilist*].

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 4—6. Not only the mercies of God in general, but each particular gift must be recognized as from Him. There can be no rain on the earth unless God send it. It is by rain from Heaven that all the herbs and plants grow and are nourished.

Though God be pleased to make use of man's labour in producing the fruits of the earth; yet He can increase and preserve them without it. This should make man:—1. Thankful, as it gives him employment. 2. Humble, as it gives him to feel his dependence. 3. Hopeful, as fruit will reward his diligence.

The labour of man:—1. Should be obedient to God's command. 2. Dependent upon God's blessing. 3. Productive of general good.

God has a variety of means to accomplish His will :—1. The rain. 2. The mist. 3. He is rich in resources.

The world without a man :—1. To admire its beauty. 2. To praise its Creator. 3. To cultivate its produce. 4. To complete its design.

God can preserve His creatures without ordinary means.

Verse 7. THE HUMILITY AND DIGNITY OF MAN.

"*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground.*" **I. Then man ought not to indulge a spirit of pride.** Man's body was formed out of the dust of the earth. A remembrance of this fact ought to inspire a feeling of genuine humility within the heart of the race. It should keep men from pride in reference to their renowned ancestry, their apparel, or their wealth.

"*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground.*" **II. Then man ought not to indulge a spirit of hostility to God.** 1. *Because they are the workmanship of His hands.* God has made us; we are His workmanship. Shall we then contend with our Maker, the finite with the Infinite? Rather it will be our wisdom to cultivate a loving, prayerful spirit, than to provoke Him by impenitence and sin. We are of the dust of the earth, and are therefore unequal to contend with that Being who has all the armies of heaven at His command.

"*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground.*" **III. Then man should remember His mortality.** As man was taken from the dust, so certainly will he return to it before long. Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return, will be spoken at the grave of the world. Our bodies are daily sinking into their original elements. Teach me the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am. This should be our constant prayer. Here, then, we have presented one aspect of the being of man; take another :—

"***And breathed into his nostrils the** breath of life; and man became a living soul.*" **I. Then man is something more than physical organization.** Man is not merely dust; not merely body; he is also a living soul. His bodily organization is not the seat of thought, emotion, volition, and immortality; these are evoked by the inspiration of the Almighty. From this text we learn that the soul of man was not generated with, but that it was subsequently inbreathed by God into, his body. We cannot admit the teaching of some, that the soul of man is a part of God; this is little better than blasphemy. It is only a Divine gift. The gift is priceless. It is responsible.

"*And breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*" **II. Then man should cultivate a moral character, pursue employments, and anticipate a destiny commensurate with this Divine inspiration.** Men gifted with immortal souls should endeavour to bring them into harmony with their Author and Giver, to make them pure as He is pure, and benevolent as He is benevolent; they should never be degraded by sin. Our souls ought to live in communion with God. They ought to be employed in the grandest pursuits of the universe. They ought to anticipate a heavenly destiny, where their powers will be unfettered, their happiness complete, and their devotion eternal.

However base the matter of man's body, God hath formed it into an excellent piece of work :—1. Let us praise God for our bodies. 2. Let us use them to His glory. 3. Let us not defile them by sin. 4. Let us await their transformation.

The soul of man, by which he lives, comes immediately from God. 1. A gift Divine. 2. Valuable. 3. Responsible.

The life of man consisting in the union of the soul with the body hath but a weak foundation.

Life :—1. Rich in its source. 2. Weak in its channel. 3. Eminent in its degree. Noble in its capabilities. 5. Immortal in its continuance.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 8—17.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN.

There has been much speculation as to the situation of the Garden of Eden; but in vain, it is utterly impossible to ascertain its site. All vestage of it was probably swept away by the deluge. This, however, is of little moment, in comparison with the higher and more solemn moral truths with which this garden stands connected. In these the world is interested, in them it finds its most difficult problems, and the only explanation of its present condition. **I. In this garden provision was made for the happiness of man.** This is evident from the description of the garden found in these verses. 1 *The garden was beautiful.* There was planted in it "every tree that is pleasant to the sight." Beautiful scenery does much to enhance the comfort and enjoyment of man: in order to gaze upon it men will travel to the ends of the earth. By all that was lovely and inspiring in material nature, Adam was daily surrounded. 2. *The garden was fruitful.* "And good for food." Hence with the beautiful in nature, there was blended all that would be needful to supply the temporal requirements of man. The material beauty by which he was surrounded was only indicative of the plenty that everywhere presented itself for his service. 3. *The garden was well watered,* "and a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads." Thus we cannot wonder at the beauty and fertility of this garden. *The teaching of this garden is, that God intended man to enjoy a happy life.* He did not design that man should be shut up in a cloister, but that he should wander amid the beautiful scenes of nature; He did not design that man should lead a melancholy and sad life, but that he should be jubilant, and that his joy should be inspired by all that was beautiful and morally good. In this happy picture of primeval life we have God's ideal of life, a pattern for our own. **II. In this garden provision was made for the daily occupation of man.** "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." 1. *Work is the law of man's being.* Work is a divine ordination. God put Adam to it. He was the first Employer of labour. Man's ideal of life is to have nothing to do, to be "independent" as it is called. Work is compatible with the most ideal existence. It is a token of dignity; a willingness to perform it, is a vestige of the former splendour of our being. People tell us that work is the result of the fall. This is not true. Man worked before he fell, but free from fatigue or pain. The element of pain which has been infused into work, that is the result of the fall. Man must work. He is prompted to it by natural instincts. He is cheered in it by happy results. He is rewarded after it by an approving conscience. (1) *Man's work should be practical.* Adam was to dress the garden. It is man's work to develop, and make God's universe as productive as possible. Some men spend their lives in speculation; it would be far better if they would employ them in digging. Aim to be practical in your toil. The world needs practical workers. The world is full of men who want to be great workers, and they would be, if they would only undertake little tasks. (2) *Man's work should be healthful.* There is no employment more healthy than that of husbandry. It enables a man to get plenty of fresh air. It will make him stalwart. It would be much better for the health of the world if less men were engaged in offices, and more in the broad fields. (3) *Man's work should be taken as from God.* "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden." This will dignify work. It will inspire the worker. It will attain the full meaning of service. A man who lets God put him to his trade, is likely to be successful. 2. *Work is the benediction of man's being.* Work makes men happy. Indolence is misery.

If all the artizans of our country were freed from their employment to-morrow, it would not increase their joy; to what would they turn their attention? Work is the truest blessing we have. It occupies our time. It keeps from mischief. It supplies our temporal wants. It enriches society. It wins the approval of God. **III. In this garden provision was made for the spiritual obedience of man.** 1. *God gave man a command to obey.* Adam was not entirely to do as he liked in this garden, one restriction was made known to him. He was to be none the less happy. He was to be none the less free. He was to be the more obedient to that Being who had so kindly ordered his circumstances. Man is not to do as he likes in this world. God places him under moral restrictions, which are for his welfare, but which he has the ability to set aside. There are certain trees in the world, of whose fruit we are not to eat. But these restrictions are not irksome or unreasonable, they refer only to *one* tree in all the great garden of life. Let us attend to the regulation which the gospel puts upon our use of the creatures by which we are every day surrounded. 2. *God annexed a penalty in the case of disobedience.* (1) *The penalty was clearly made known.* (2) *It was certain in its infliction.* (3) *It was terrible in its result.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

THE TWO PARADISES.—Gen. xxii. 8 ; Rev. ii. 2.

Verse 8. **I. Compare the Places.** The second is superior to the first. 1. In respect to its *elements.* What was dust in the first paradise was gold in the second. 2. Of its *extent.* The first paradise was the corner of a small planet; the second is a universe of glory in which nations dwell, and whose limits angels know not. 3. Of its beauty.

II. Compare the Inhabitants. of the two paradises. The inhabitants of the second are superior to those of the first. 1. *In physical nature.* 2. *In employment.* The employment of heaven will relate to *beings* rather than to *things.* The sphere of activity will be more amongst souls than flowers. Will call into exercise loftier faculties; will tend more to the glory of God. 3. *In rank.* 4. *In freedom.* 5. *In security.* Adam was liable to temptation and evil. In the second paradise is immunity from peril. 6. *In vision of God.* In the first paradise God walked amid the trees of the garden. Adam realizes the overshadowing Presence. The inhabitants of the second paradise shall enjoy that Presence more perfectly. (1.) Vision brighter. (2.) Constant. [*Pulpit Analyst.*]

A garden:—1. Its plantation. 2. Its situation. 3. Its occupation.

Verse 9. As God gives us all things freely, so He takes special notice of all that He bestows upon us.

Every plant grows where, and in what manner God appoints it.

God's bounty abounds unto men, not only to the supply of their want, but also for their delight.

It is usual with God to mix delight and pleasure with usefulness and profit in all his blessings.

God's commandments ought to be full in view of His people.

It is usual with God to teach His children by things of common use.

Verses 10—15. God's blessings are in every way complete and perfect.

Springs and rivers of waters are not amongst the least of God's blessings.

Every son of Adam is bound to some employment:—1. Necessary to mutual subsistence. 2. The creatures of the world are not serviceable without toil. 3. To occupy time. 4. To employ our faculties.

Our daily calling—1. Undertaken by a Divine warrant. 2. Pursued with cheerfulness and fidelity. 3. Guided by God's word. 4. Seeking the good of the community. 5. Abiding there till God shall discharge us.

Duty and not gain should be the ground of our daily calling.

Man's employment ought to be in those places where it is most needed.

Very rich in earthly treasure was the habitation of innocency.

Verses 16, 17.—Eden: or God's voice to man on entering his earthly sphere of life.

I. That man's earthly sphere of life is furnished with vast and varied blessings. "Of every tree." There are many trees of pleasure for man in this life. 1. *There is the sensational tree.* Material nature with its million branches is a tree all thickly clustered with fruit. 2. *There is the intellectual tree.* Life is crowded with ideas, every form of life embodies them, every event starts them. 3. *There is the social tree.* 4. *There is the religious tree.* This gives it beauty and worth to all. What a rich garden is our earthly life.

II. That these vast and varied blessings are to be used under certain Divine regulations. "But of the tree."

1. *His regulations are proper.* 2. *His regulations are liberal.* 3. *His regulations are needful.*

III. That the violation of these Divine regulations will entail the utmost ruin. "Thou shalt surely die." To disobey God is sin, and the wages of sin is death. Disobedience to God will produce death.—[*Homilist.*]

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 18—25.

THE CREATION OF WOMAN.

I. Woman was brought to man in order that she might relieve his solitude by intelligent companionship.—"And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone." When we thus state that man was lonely we do not mean to imply that the world in which he lived was a desolate waste, but simply that it was destitute of proper companionship for him. The beasts of the field were created, and were divinely presented to Adam that he might recognize them, that he might name them, that they might awaken his intellectual energies, and that their departure might awaken within him the thought of loneliness. But the brutes are not companions for man, they cannot enter into the high enjoyments of his intellectual life, nor can they join him in his devotional moods. He is separated from them by a wide abyss; he is their lord, they are unknowingly his servants. Then if man could not find a companion in the earth beneath, could he not in the heaven above? Was not God his companion and friend. God was his frequent visitant, but nothing more. The finite mind of Adam could not have found the rest it needed in the infinite problem and presence of God. As in the case of the brutes, Adam was too much their superior to find in them companionship. So the Divine Being was too much superior to Adam for the terrestrial companionship he needed. In order to true and happy companionship there must be a fair equality of intellectual power, of moral sympathy, and a real community of daily life, existing between the parties. Hence there was a deep necessity, in order to relieve the loneliness of Adam, that another human being should be created to keep him constant company. Man to-day can have no idea of the loneliness of Adam, as he first stepped out into life. He was the first man. He stood in a great silence. There were none to whom he could express the deep feeling of his heart. Things are altered now. The world is crowded. Instead of solitude, there are crowds. Instead of silence, there is uproar. Instead of loneliness, there are far too many companionships inviting the truant attention of man. And this condition of the world is more adapted to the number and strength of man's mental capacities and moral energies. It is more likely to develop both. It is more conducive to his happiness. It may be likewise more conducive to temptation. Companionship may be a curse, as it often is a blessing.

II. Woman was brought to man that she might be his helpmeet in the struggles of life. "I will make him a help-meet for him." Adam needed a help-meet:—1. *To develop his intellectual thinkings.* When Adam was created he would have but few ideas, which would be very crude, more characterized by wonder than by settled conviction. His mind would need development. Eve would encourage this development; instigated by curiosity, and by a desire to know the meaning of the things around, they would together pursue the study of the material universe. Thus their minds would expand,

and with this expansion they would attain mental sympathy, through being unitedly employed in the same research. They would have common themes of thought and conversation. Wives should aid and encourage the mental development of their husbands, together they should inquire into the mysteries of the universe, and they would find glad employment in so doing, healthful exercise as well as definite result. 2. *To culture his moral sympathies.* Adam was strong in manhood, and it is not often that strength combines pathos. Hence there was need that one of loving heart, and tender disposition should subdue by unspoken influence the lord of creation, and by awakening within his soul feelings of gentleness, should strengthen the sceptre which God had put into his hand. The influence of woman should make men sympathetic, should give them a heart to feel the world's pain and enable them to manifest to those who need it, a patient love. 3. *To aid him in the daily needs of life.* Even in Eden man had certain physical wants, and though we never read of Eve as engaged in the very necessary pursuits of ordinary female life, yet no doubt they were not forgotten by her. In harmony with the early times she no doubt provided for the daily wants of her husband. Wives show their true womanhood by so doing. A wife who will neglect the temporal wants of her family and home, is unworthy the name. 4. *To join him in his worship of God.* We can imagine that the souls of Adam and Eve would be full of devotion and praise. They had been immediately created by God. They were the sole proprietors of the soil. They were to be the progenitors of humanity. Their lives were full of spiritual joy. Their souls were pure. God came to them in glorious vision. Together they would worship him. Let husbands and wives throughout the world join together in their prayers and praises. Thus woman is man's help-meet, to rejoice in his joy, to share his sorrow, to minister to his comfort, and to aid his religious life and worship.

III. Woman was brought to man that she might receive his love, protection, and care. Eve was taken from the side of Adam, that she might be equal with him ; from near his heart that she might be loved by him ; from under his arm that she might be protected by him. Woman was not intended to be man's slave. In many heathen nations this is the case, but wherever the Bible is taken, it teaches the moral elevation of woman. How intimate is the marriage relationship. The two become one flesh. They forsake all other relationship, comparatively, for the new one assumed. A man never shows more respect for himself than when he manifests love and respect for his wife. It is a great sin to violate this holy relationship, either by brutality or neglect. LESSONS :—1. *The Divine compassion for a lonely man.* 2. *That marriage is to furnish man with true companionship of soul.* 3. *That marriage is to aid man in all the exigencies of life.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 18. This complete loneliness, marking an imperfect life, was thoroughly unique. Whatever exileship or bereavement may effect, whatever selfishness, or misanthropy, or great grief for the dead may make you feel for the time, you can never have reproduced in you Adam's loneliness. The world around teems with human life that wants your blessing; and there are in the biographies of men, in your memories of the departed, in the presence still on earth of the good and the noble, helpers to the heart and mind such as Adam could not know in his solitude. Even the "last man" will have interwoven with his very being memories of human companions, and have upon him uneffaceable impressions of them such as were impossible to the first man [*Homilist*].

The creation of woman :—1. The occasion. 2. The resolution. 3. The preparation. 4. The presentation.

Loneliness is not good :—1. For intellectual development. 2 For moral culture. 3. For true enjoyment. 4. A rebuke to monks.

Loneliness not good:—1. For man's comfort. 2. For man's employment. 3. For posterity.

The woman a help:—1. For assistance in family government. 2. For the comfort of society. 3. For the continuance of the race.

God knows all the wants of man and graciously makes arrangements to supply them:—1. The sabbath for rest. 2. The garden for pleasure and work. 3. The wife for companionship.

A wife is not good, till it be not good to be without a wife.

A man may, and it is God's will that he should, be the better for his wife:—1. She builds up the House (*Prov.* xiv. 1). 2. She profits him in his estate (*Prov.* xxxi. 12). 3. She easeth him of his cares in looking to the ways of her family (*Prov.* xxxi. 27). 4. She adviseth him by her counsels (*Gen.* xxi. 10). 5. She comforts him in his sorrows. 6. She helps to foresee and prevent danger (1 *Sam.* xxv. 18, 33). 7. She furthers him in piety, by seasonable encouragements, reverent admonitions, and by joining with him in holy prayers.

Only the wife brought by God is likely to be good.

A wife the helper of her husband:—1. Not his guide. 2. Not his ruler. 3. Not his slave. 4. But his counsellor.

A wife cannot be a good wife unless she be a meet and fit wife:—1. In parentage. 2. In estate. 3. In education. 4. In disposition. 5. In religion.

Jehovah Elohim, man's Creator, knows what in every kind is good for man.

The judgment of the great God is, that it is in no way good for man, in respect of natural, civil, or spiritual relations, to abide alone.

Man was not made for a solitary, but for a sociable life, and to commune with God.

God in goodness makes that good for man which he stands in need of.

The woman is God's workmanship as well as the man.

The woman created last:—1. The ground of her inferiority. 2. The reason of her subjection. 3. Her plea for protection.

The woman a help to man:—1. God given. 2. Ready. 3. Willing. 4. Welcome.

Verse 19. If man had been formed out of the ground, the ground could not give him a companion.

God brought the beasts to Adam before he created Eve, in order that the unserviceableness of other things should enhance the worth of the truly good.

God can order the creature to do what he wishes:—1. The ravens to feed Elijah. 2. The she bears to destroy the scoffing children. 3. The lion to meet the prophet. 4. The sparrows. God is pleased to honour man so far, to employ them in many things which of right belong unto Himself:—1. To encourage men to His service. 2. To unite men in love. 3. To increase their reward and talents.

Jehovah is maker, and will have Adam be the namer of all the creatures in the earth:—1. A token of sovereignty. 2. A token of ownership. 3. A token of power.

"*To see what he would call them.*" If he had been permitted to name himself, it should have been, probably, the Son of God, as he is called by *St. Luke* (Chapter iii. 38) in regard of his creation. But God, to humble him, calls him first, Adam, and after the fall, Enosh, that is, frail, sorry man. [*Trapp.*]

Verse 20. As the beasts were no companion for man, we observe that no creature ought to be applied to any other use than God at first designed for it:—1. God hath made all his works in wisdom. 2. That God's sovereignty may be acknowledged. 3. That confusion may be avoided.

Brutes no companions for man:—1. They have not common speech. 2. They have not common employments. 3. Their lives are not guided by common rules. 4. They do not live for common ends.

Verse 21. *"A deep sleep to fall upon Adam."* Whether it was a sleep or a trance cannot be gathered from the text. It was such a sleep, questionless, that took from Adam the power of observation till the work was ended. Some conceive that he was cast into this sleep:—1. To take from him the sense of pain, which the taking out of his rib would involve. 2. That the work might be wholly of God. 3. That the Divine Providence might be the more apparent in providing a helpmeet for him when he was asleep. 4. To hide the operation from man.

The *rib* was probably taken for its situation in the body:—1. Not from the head or foot, to manifest that the place of the wife was to be neither above nor far below her husband. 2. That it was taken from a place near the heart, to indicate the true affection with which man must regard his wife. 3. Because this part of the body is covered with the arms, it denotes the protection the wife should receive. Perhaps the rib was taken because it could be the best spared from the body of man without deforming it. The *bone* was also taken, not so much to indicate the moral stiffness of woman as her firmness in help and need.

God does not shew men how He works, He only manifests the product of his toil.

God takes care of us, and provides for our good even while we are asleep.

God takes nothing from us but He takes care to recompense it to us again.

He that marrieth in the Lord, marrieth also with the Lord; and he cannot be absent from his own marriage. A good wife was one of the first real and royal gifts bestowed upon Adam; and God consults not with him to make him happy. As he was ignorant while himself was made, so shall he not know while a second self is made out of him; both that the comfort might be greater than was expected, as also that he might not upbraid his wife with any great dependence or obligation; he neither willing the work, nor suffering any pain to have it done. The rib cannot challenge no more of her than the earth can of him" [*Trapp*].

The woman was only made of one bone lest she should be stiff and stubborn [*B. King*].

Verse 22. Man's first sight of woman:—1. One of admiration. 2. One of gratitude. 3. One of love.

God hath allowed but one wife to one man.

Every child of God must desire to receive his wife from God's hand:—1. That God, who looks at the heart, is only able rightly to direct their choice. 2. It implies an obligation to make a right use of marriage. 3. It sweetens all the crosses of life.

Verse 23. True marriage:—1. Of God's making. 2. Of woman's consenting. 3. Of man's reception.

Man and wife are one flesh and bone.

The woman's flesh was from man, not her soul.

Marriage is an emblem of spiritual union between Christ and his church.

Marriage is of God's institution.

The happiest marriage is between souls stamped with God's image.

Verse 24. God hath not only instituted marriage, but given law also to rule it.

The union between parents and children is less than between man and wife, and therefore must give place.

God's law warrants the children's desertion of their fathers to contract marriage in a lawful way. No honour due is to be denied to parents.

Cleaving in mutual love to each other is the great conjugal law:—

1. Such cleaving must be sincere.
2. Such cleaving must be reciprocal.
3. Such cleaving must be without end.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

BY THE

REV. WM. ADAMSON.

Six Days! Ver. 1. Conceive of six separate pictures, in which this great work is represented in each successive stage of its progress towards completion. As the performance of the painter, though it must have natural truth for its foundation, must not be considered or judged of as a delineation of mathematical or scientific accuracy; so neither must this pictorial representation of the creation be regarded as literally and exactly true. As these few verses are but a synopsis or conspectus of Chap. I., so the pictures in that chapter are but a brief description under the symbol of days of a work stretching over thousands of years

While earth throughout her farthest climes
imbibed
The influence of heaven.

Sabbath! Ver. 2. Six days had now elapsed since the work of creation was commenced, but the dawn of Sabbath was the first which had shone upon the earth as finished, and occupied by man. This completes the *pictures* of the young world. God hangs this on the palace walls of truth as the seventh painting; and on its imperishable canvas, traced with indelible hues, one sees man keeping a Sabbath in Paradise. What an image of blessed tranquility and rest! This was the great day of the earth's dedication to the service of God. The earth became holy ground, and must not be polluted by any profane act. And thus paradise and the Sabbath are coeval. They stand together on the same page of the Bible. They are seen shining like twin stars in the morning sky of the world—blending their lights in one like those binary stars in the material heavens.

There is no day so glad as that,
God's holy day of rest.
There is no day so sad as that,
Unhallowed and unblest.

Sabbath! Ver. 2. Some one has said that a world without a Sabbath would be like a man without a smile—like a summer without flowers—like a homestead without a garden. It is the joyous day of the whole week. And yet, if there is to be the Sabbath joy in the day, there must be the Sabbath spirit in the heart. It is the heart at rest which makes the Sabbath a joy; and there can only be a true Sabbath gladness in those hearts

Where Gospel light is glowing
With pure and radiant beams,
And living waters flowing,
With soul-refreshing streams.—
Wordsworth.

Sabbath! Ver. 2. On the sides of an English coal mine, limestone is in constant process of formation, caused by the trickling of water through the rocks. This water contains a great many particles of lime, which are deposited in the mine, and, as the water passes off, these become hard, and form the limestone. This stone would always be white, like white marble, were it not that men are working in the mine, and as the black dust rises from the coal it mixes with the soft lime, and in that way a black stone is formed. Now, in the night, when there is no coal-dust rising, the stone is white; then again, the next day, when the miners are at work, another black layer is formed, and so on alternately black and white through the week until Sabbath comes. Then if the miners keep holy the Sabbath, a much larger layer of white stone will be formed than before. There will be the white stone of Saturday night, and the whole day and night of the Sabbath, so that every seventh day the white layer will be about three times as thick as any of the others. But if the men work on the Sabbath they see it marked against them in the stone. Hence the miners call it "the Sunday stone." How they need to be very careful to observe this holy day, when they would see their violation of God's command thus written down in stone—an image of the indelible record in heaven!

Heaven here: man on those hills of myrrh
and flowers;
A gleam of glory after six days' showers.—
Vaughan.

Sabbath-symbol! Ver. 3. It is, writes Chalmers, a favourite speculation of mine, that—if spared to sixty—we then enter upon the seventh decade of human life; and that this, if possible, should be turned into the *Sabbath* of our earthly pilgrimage, and spent sabbatically, as if on the shores of an eternal world, or in the outer court (as it were) of the temple that is above—the tabernacle in heaven. For

"Sabbaths are threefold, as St. Austin says,
The first of time, or Sabbath here of days;
The second is a conscience trespass free;
The last the SABBATH of ETERNITY."
—*Herrick.*

Sabbath-rest! Ver. 3. Like the pilgrim, the Christian sits down by this well in the desert—for what to him is the Sabbath, but a fountain in a land of drought, a palm-tree in the midst of the great wilderness—and as he drinks of the refreshing waters of this palm-shaded fountain, he is reminded of that rest which remaineth for the people of God. When, as Cumming says, that last Sabbath comes—the Sabbath of all creation—the heart, wearied with tumultuous beatings, shall have rest; and the soul, fevered with its anxieties, shall have peace. The sun of that Sabbath will never set, nor hide his splendours in a cloud. Our earthly Sabbaths are but dim reflections of the heavenly Sabbath, cast upon the earth, dimmed by the transit of their rays from so great a height and so distant a world. They are but

> "The preludes of a feast that cannot cloy,
> And the bright out-courts of immortal glory!"
> —*Barton.*

Vapour! Ver. 4. It interposes as a friendly shield between the sun and the earth, to check excessive evaporation from the one, and to ward off the rays of the other. This mist was drawn from the earth by the sun, and hovered over it. Probably for man's creation, a change took place. Clouds rose higher; and from them descended the fertilizing rains. The life of many is like the foul vapour which hangs all day over the mouth of a pit, or over the ceaseless wheels of some dingy manufactory. It is a low earthborn thing—ever brooding over worldly business. Whereas nowhere is the cloud so beautiful as when—suspended by unseen forces—it hangs high in the serene sky. Never is man's life so beautiful as when—spiritually-minded, heavenly-minded—it is lifted up above the selfishness and sordidness of a world lying in wickedness of the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. It becomes brighter and grander as it nears the gate of the west. It makes the world fairer by its presence while it lasts. It makes the twilight horizon of death ablaze with its splendour when it vanishes into the eternal world:—

> "For when he comes nearer to finish his race,
> Like a fine setting sun he looks richer in grace,
> And gives a sure hope, at the end of his days,
> Of rising in brighter array."—*Watts.*

Human Origin! Ver. 5. M. Boudon, says Percy, was one day sent for by Cardinal de Bois—the Prime Minister of France—to perform a very serious surgical operation upon him. The cardinal on seeing him enter the room, said: "Remember that you are not to treat me in the same rough manner you would treat the poor miserable wretches at your hospital." To this the eminent surgeon responded with great dignity that every one of those miserable wretches was a prime minister in his eyes. What a rebuke to pride! We are all the same flesh and blood; for

> "Man is one;
> And he hath one great heart. It is thus we feel,
> With a gigantic throb athwart the sea,
> Each other's rights and wrongs; thus are we men."—*Bailey.*

Immortality! Ver. 6. Professors Tyndal and Huxley say that man is nothing more than a combination of molecular atoms held together by certain forces which they call "organisms." If so, what becomes of personal identity? And when they dissolved, did they get rid at once and for all by death of their identity, responsibilities, hopes and fears? These men will not answer such inquiries. Till they do, the Bible view of the future life is infinitely preferable to Tyndal's vague and hazy "infinite azure of the past"—even on the low ground that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, or, as the Arabic, a thousand cranes in the air are not worth one sparrow in the hand. These men had no right to lead us to the edge of an abyss, and, bidding us look down in the deep dark chasm, tell us never to mind, but do our duty. Do our duty, indeed! How could a combination of molecular atoms do its duty—any more than a magnet? According to their view, man had no duty to discharge; at least, he had no responsilility by the non-discharge of it. But we view man otherwise than that.

> "Trust me, 'tis a clay above your scorning,
> With God's image stamped upon it, and God's kindling breath within."—*Browning.*

Living Soul! Ver. 7. About forty-five years ago a funeral was passing through the streets of Carlisle, Pennsylvania. It was the burial procession of John Hall Mason, the son of the eminent Dr. Mason, President of Dickinson College, one of the most powerful and eloquent preachers in America. The son was distinguished for his piety and talents, and his death had cast a gloom over many hearts. Many gathered to the funeral, from far and near, and especially young men. After the services at the house had been performed, and the pall-bearers had taken up the bier, a great concourse obstructed the entrance, and great confusion and noise ensued. The bereaved Doctor, observing the difficulty, and following closely the pall-bearers, exclaimed in solemn sepulchral tones: "Tread lightly, young men! tread lightly! You bear the temple of the Holy Ghost." These sentiments, as though indited by the Holy Spirit, acted like an electric shock; the crowd fell back and made the passage way clear. Through the influence of these words a most powerful revival of religion sprung up, and swept through the college, and extended over the town.

> "Since then, my God, thou hast
> So brave a temple built; O dwell in it,
> That it may dwell with Thee at last."
> —*Herbert.*

Human Mind! Ver. 7. Adam's understanding was like a golden lamp kindled at the great fountain of light. It was subject to no dimness or eclipse. Over it there never passed the shadow of darkness; and all around, over the whole region of duty, it shed a cloudless light; so that man was in no danger of losing his path, or of mistaking the limits which His Maker had set. Thus his understanding was perfect. A child may be perfect although it has not reached the stature of a man; and so Adam's mind was perfect—with a blissful tendency to enlarge, and daily to open up new sources of wonder and delight to itself.

> On! said God unto his soul,
> As to the earth, for ever. And on it went,
> A rejoicing native of the infinite—
> As a bird of air—an orb of heaven."—*Anon.*

Breath of Life! (V. 8.) God breathed into man at the first creation the breath of life, and he became a living creature. Christ breathed upon His disciples the breath of eternal life, and said: Receive ye the Holy Ghost. We have all the breath of the first creation; but this breath will not save us from the vanity and perishableness of our natural life. Christ must breathe into our souls the Holy Spirit, Who alone can make us immortal souls. To hew a block of marble from the quarry, and carve it into a noble statue—to break up a waste wilderness, and turn it into a garden of flowers—to melt a lump of iron-stone, and forge it into watch springs; all these are mighty changes. Yet they all come short of the change which every child of Adam requires—for they are merely the same thing *in a new form.* But man must become a new creature. He must be born again—born from above—born of God. God must breathe into him the breath of life. So that the natural birth is not a whit more necessary to the life of the body than is the spiritual birth to the life of the soul.—*Ryle.*

Eden! Ver. 8. Sir Henry Rawlinson, to whom we owe so much in Assyrian decipherment, long ago identified Eden with the Kar-dunias or Gan-dunias of the inscriptions. Kar-dunias is one of the names of Babylonia—perhaps properly belonging to some particular part of the country, and it is said to be watered by four rivers just like Eden in Genesis. But Dr. Wylie and others lean towards another view of the *locale* of Eden. "Paradise" is said to be a garden eastward in Eden. As these words were penned by Moses in the wilderness south of Judea, it is self-evident that Eden must be considerably east of Palestine. Some have thought of the noble plain around Damascus, which is well-watered, luxuriant, and rich. Others have found it in that district known as Arabia Felix, so called on account of the eminent richness of its pastures. While others have seen it in that region somewhere between Bagdad and Bussorah at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates. Here the soil is fertile, the climate delicious, and the noble stream which waters it diffuses a delightful freshness and verdure throughout the great plain along which it flows. Here the skies are serene; and the earth might wear everlastingly a robe of vernal beauty were it not for the neglect and barbarity of man. It is now occupied by ignorant and barbarous tribes under the nominal sceptre of the Shah of Persia. Beyond this we can make no nearer approach to the seat of primæval innocence.

"Well named
A paradise, for never earth has worn
Such close similitude to heaven as there."
—*Bickersteth.*

Man! Ver. 8. He was to be the High Priest of creation, the mysterious yet glorious link between the material and spiritual. On him God placed his Eden robes that he might officiate on the first sabbath as a holy Levite before the Lord. Paradise was the temple prepared for him by his Creator, in which to worship the Holy and Eternal One. It was the glory of man that God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and made him a living soul, in order that he might stand as the annointed priest in the midst of the great congregation of creation, to give a tongue to all around him, that, through him, the loud anthem of universal adoration might rise too. And though man is no longer nature's minister before the Lord, and no longer resembles a walking orange tree swinging perfume from every little censer it holds up to the air, yet

"That day God's church doth still confess,
At once creation and redemption's feast,
Sign of a world called forth, a world forgiven."
Mant.

Work! Ver. 8. Not only did Adam work before the Fall; but also nature and nature's God. From the particle of dust at our feet to man, the last stroke of God's handiwork, all bear the impress of the law of labour. The earth, as has been said, is one vast laboratory, where decomposition and re-formation are constantly going on. The blast of nature's furnace never ceases, and its fires never burn low. The lichen of the rock, and the oak of the forest, each works out the problem of its own existence. The earth, the air and the water teem with busy life. The poet tells us that the joyous song of labour sounds out from the million-voiced earth, and the rolling spheres join the universal chorus! Therefore, labour is not, as Tupper expresses it, the curse on the sons of men in all their ways. Rather—

"In the master's vineyard,
Go and work to-day;
Be no useless sluggard
Standing in the way."—*Bonar.*

Healthy Work! Ver. 8. It is not, says one, work that kills men; it is worry. Work is healthy; you can hardly put more upon a man than he can bear. Motion is all nature's law. Action is man's salvation, both physical and mental. Rest is ruin; therefore he only is wise, who lays himself out to work till life's latest hour; and that is the man who will live the longest, and live to the most purpose. Work gives a feeling of strength, and in this our highest pleasure consists. It is vigour; for an angel's wing would droop if long at rest. As an Oriental couplet expresses the idea in quaint guise:—

"Good striving
Brings thriving;
Better a dog who works
Than a lion who shirks.

Tree! Ver. 11. A tree, called the manchaneel, grows in the West Indies. Its appearance is very attractive, and the wood of it peculiarly beautiful. It bears a kind of fruit resembling the golden pippin. This fruit looks very tempting, and smells very fragrant—

"Not balm new bleeding from the wounded
tree,
Nor bless'd Arabia with her spicy grove,
Such fragrance yields."

But to eat of it is instant death. Its sap is so poisonous that, if a few drops of it fall on the skin, it raises blisters and occasions great pain. The Indians dip their arrows in the juice, that they may poison their enemies when they wound them.

Paradise! Ver. 12. To dream of a paradise on earth is to dream of what never can be realised. There is, however, another paradise into which we may enter—a paradise whose gates stand open day and night—at whose doors are ministers of grace to invite us to enter—within whose precincts are the Tree of Life and the Water of Life. It is the garden of His Church. Yet are the beauties of the Gospel paradise nought compared with the unfading charms of the Heavenly Eden. A traveller in the east was once invited to see the glory of a prince's garden. It was the night-blooming *cereus;* glorious indeed, with its creamy waxen buds and full bloom of exquisite form—the leaves of the carolla of a pale golden hue, and the petals intensely white. He saw it just as the short twilight of the tropics was deepening into night, and the beauteous flowers were beginning to exhale their wondrous perfume. But this sweet burst of glory he considered as nothing when, at the midnight hour, he saw the plant in all its queenlike radiance at perfect maturity, as the full glory of a royal garden revealed to his eye. So, beautiful as was the natural paradise, and beautiful as is the spiritual paradise, their beauty will be nothing to that of the upper paradise.

"O there are gardens of the immortal kind,
That crown the Heavenly Eden's rising hills
With beauty and with sweets;
The branches bend laden with life and bliss."
— *Watts.*

Eden and Gethsemane! Ver. 13. We compare the earthly with the heavenly paradise, but do we contrast Eden with Gethsemane? The earthly Eden was man's Gethsemane—his garden of woe and sweat. The Gethsemane is man's spiritual Eden, where crimson flowers bloom brilliant as the sunset rays, and emit an odour sweeter far than the spicy perfumes wafted from eastern gardens. It has been very quaintly put thus:

"Sweet Eden was the arbour of delight,
Yet in its honey flowers our poison blew;
Sad Gethsemane, the bower of baleful night,
Where Christ a health of poison for us
drew,
Yet all our honey in that poison grew."
—*Fletcher.*

Tree of Life! Ver. 9. In Eastern poetry they tell of a wondrous tree, on which grew golden apples and silver bells; and every time the breeze went by and tossed the fragrant branches, a shower of those golden apples fell, and the living bells chimed and tinkled forth their airy ravishment. On the gospel tree there grow melodious blossoms; sweeter bells than those which mingled with the pomegranates on Aaron's vest; holy feelings, heaven-taught joys; and when the wind blowing where he listeth, the south wind waking, when the Holy Spirit breathes upon that soul, there is the shaking down of mellow fruits, and the flow of healthy odours all around, and the gush of sweet music, where gentle tones and joyful echoings are wafted through the recesses of the soul. Not easily explained to others, and too ethereal to define, these joys are on that account but the more delightful. The sweet sense of forgiveness; the conscious exercise of all the devout affections, and grateful and adoring emotions God-ward; the lull of sinful passions, itself ecstatic music; an exulting sense of the security of the well-ordered covenant; the gladness of surety righteousness, and the kindly spirit of adoption, encouraging to say, "Abba, Father," all the delightful feelings which the Spirit of God increases or creates, and which are summed up in that comprehensive word, "Joy in the Holy Ghost."—*Hamilton.*

Blessings! Ver. 16. Holmes remarks that a man may look long enough in search of particles of iron, which he was told were in a dish of sand, and fail to detect them. But let another come, and sweep a magnet through the sand, and soon the invisible particles would be discerned by the mere power of attraction! The thankless heart is like the finger, it cannot see the innumerable—the vast and varied blessings. The magnet is that truly grateful spirit, which, sweeping through the earth, discovers many a rich earthly treasure.

In the nine heavens are eight paradises,
Where is the ninth one? In the human
heart.
Given to thee are those eight paradises,
When thou the ninth one hast within thy
heart.—*Oriental.*

Helpmeet! Ver. 18. "For Adam was not found an helpmeet." This was an anomalous position. All the beings with whom hitherto he had come in contact were either above him or below him. No one was his equal—*he was alone.* Around him were innumerable servants; but the wide circle of his empire did not contain one with whom he could reciprocate affection—with whom he could in all points sympathise. To supply this blank a new creation had to take place—a fairer form was to enrich the earth than any which it yet contained.

For there's that sweetness in a female mind,
Which in a man, we cannot hope to find.—
Pomfret.

Home Duties! Ver. 18. The duties of domes tic life—exercised as they must be in retirement, and calling forth all the sensibilities of the female—are perhaps as necessary to the full development of her charms as the shades and shadows are to the rose; confirming its beauty, and increasing its fragrance:—

For nothing lovelier can be found
In woman, than to study household good,
And good works in her husband to promote.
Milton.

Feminine Solace! Ver. 18. Washington Irving likens such a woman to the vine. As the vine, which has long twined its graceful foliage about the oak, and been lifted by it in sunshine, will, when the hardy plant is rifted by the thunderbolt, cling round it with its caressing tendrils, and bind up its shattered boughs; so it is beautifully ordered by Providence that woman should be man's stay and solace when smitten with sudden calamity—binding up the broken heart.

"'Tis woman's to bind up the broken heart,
And soften the bending spirit's smart;
And to light in this world of sin and pain,
The lamp of love, and of joy again."—*Anon.*

Wife-help! Ver. 19. Guelph, the Duke of Bavaria, was besieged in his castle, and compelled to capitulate to the Emperor Conrad. His lady demanded for herself and the other ladies safe conduct to a place of safety, with whatever they could carry. This was granted; and to the astonishment of all, the ladies appeared, carrying their husbands on their backs. Thus wives aided their husbands: and never in the gayest moods in tournament or court did those fair dames look more lovely.

"Tis beauty that doth oft make women proud;
'Tis virtue that doth make them most admired."—*Shakespeare.*

Woman! Ver. 19. Hargrave says that women are the poetry of the world in the same sense as the stars are the poetry of heaven. Clear, light-giving harmonies, women are the terrestrial planets that rule the destinies of mankind.

"Ye are stars of the night, ye are gems of the morn,
Ye are dewdrops, whose lustrue illumines the thorn."—*Moore.*

Adam's Sleep! Ver. 21. When we look at Adam cast into a deep sleep, we take courage in the prospect of that change which all of us must undergo; for is not the *first* man's trance or slumber an emblem of death? And may not God enable the believer to yield up his spirit at last, as easily as Adam did his rib? It was Jehovah who cast him into a deep sleep, and it is Jehovah Jesus who leads the saint down into the valley of the shadow of death for a little while. Of Stephen we read that he fell asleep. The execrations of his enemies were yet ringing in his ears, when God caused a deep and tranquil repose to fall upon him.

"Softly within that resting-place
We lay their wearied limbs, and bid the clay
Press lightly on them till the *night be past*,
And the far east give note of coming DAY.

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. **Serpent.]** Heb. *na-chash*: "so called from its hissing" (Gesenius); "named perhaps from hissing" (Fürst): rendered "serpent" by Young, Leeser, Murphy, and others; *ophis* by the Sept., and *serpens* by the Vulg. Prof. Tayler Lewis (in Lange's Genesis) thinks "the name may have been given to the serpent from its glossy, shining appearance, or more likely from the bright glistening of the eye." The main point is that there seems to be no sufficient reason to doubt that the "serpent" is here intended. It is perhaps of more importance to attend to what follows. **Was more subtle.]** This is undoubtedly an inadequate rendering: "had become subtle (or crafty)" would more satisfactorily render what is to be seen in the original;—in which the following points are observable. (1) The meaning of the root *hayah* as equivalent to *become*,—a point strangely overlooked by lexicographers and expositors. We are glad however to find Driver (Heb. Tenses, p. 206) expressly setting this forth: he says that *hayah* is "much more" γίγνεται than ἐστὶ, *i.e.*, "much more" *becomes* than *is*. (2) The *tense*, which is here the perfect, and which, to suit the general style of the A.V., ought to have been rendered as a pluperfect (a "past behind a past"): "had become." In consistency Murphy ought to have so rendered the word in this place, having already very properly translated ch. i. 2: "And the earth had become a waste and a void." There is a remarkable sameness of construction in the two places,—extending even to the next particular; viz.: (3) The emphatic precedence of the nominative, a circumstance never to be overlooked in Hebrew composition. As there: "But THE EARTH had become a waste and a void;" so here: "But THE SERPENT had become crafty beyond all the living creatures," &c. This alone brings out the force and feeling of the original. Strong emphasis implies contrast; contrast finds no more than due expression in the admonitory "But," which here sounds like the death-knell of paradise. All so far had gone on well: "BUT—THE SERPENT had become crafty." *How?* We are not at this time informed. It might be premature, were the sacred story as yet to attempt to tell. What we have since learnt, however (Rev. xx. 2), makes this strange, lone hint one of deep interest to the reflecting reader.—24. **Cherubims.]** The final "s" is superfluous: the word should be either "cherubim," or, what comes to the same thing, "cherubs." It is of much more consequence to know and remember that the Heb. has the definite article. This is very significant. It implies that, when the book of Genesis was written, the notion of "the cherubim" had become "familiar." Instead of wearying the reader with the numerous, and for the most part obviously far-fetched conjectures which critics have indulged in as to the derivation and meaning of the word *cherub*, we will merely say that perhaps one of the latest and simplest explanations is the best. Fürst regards the root (*k-r-b*) as meaning "to seize, catch, lay hold of;" and compares with it the Sanscrit *gribh*, Persian *giriften*, Greek *γρυπ*, *γρυφ*, German *grip*, *krip*, *greif*, &c. If, as he says, the word is an "abstract," and signifies "the seizing, laying hold of," even so a ready application of the term to the objects intended may be made. But if, as we venture to think, *karubh* is simply a pure *passive*, then the meaning yielded by it would be "the seized ones," "the laid hold of ones," "the possessed ones,"—than which a more fitting significance could scarcely be imagined (cf. especially Ps. xviii. 10; lxxx. 1; Ez. x.) On the one hand, the cherubim laid hold of and enclosed the divine glory; and, on the other, the divine power laid hold of and directed these upbearers of the divine majesty.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—7.

THE FIRST GREAT TEMPTATION.

It is well for the military general to study the plan and the history of great battles that have been fought in the past, in order that he may learn how best to order and arrange his troops in the event of war. So human life is a great moral campaign. The battle-field is the soul of man. The conflicting powers are Satan and humanity, good and evil. In the history of the first great temptation of our first parents we have a typical battle, in which we see the methods of satanic approach to the soul, and which it will be well for us to contemplate. It is well to learn how to engage in the moral conflicts of life, before we are actually called into them. Every day should find us better warriors in the service of right.

I. That the human soul is frequently tempted by a dire foe of unusual subtlety. "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field." 1. *The tempter of human souls is subtile.* He presents himself to the soul of man in the most insidious forms, in the most fascinating ways, and with the most alluring promises. He endeavours to make men think when in the service of God, that they are ignorant of the grand mysteries of the universe, that the tree of knowledge, of which they dare not eat, contains the secret of their lives, and that if they will, contrary to the Divine command, partake of it, they will step into the Supreme temple of wisdom. Hence the curiosity of man is awakened. A strange fascination takes possession of his spirit. He is led to violate the Divine behest. Or, the devil will tell men that in the service of God, they are deprived of liberty; and for the freedom of goodness he offers them the wild license of sin, and lured by this hope he gets them to eat forbidden fruit. Satan has many schemes by which to lead men contrary to the will of God, and in opposition to their own moral welfare. He can adapt himself to any circumstance. He can make use of any agency. He often comes to us when we are lonely. He has access to our most beautiful Edens. 2. *The tempter of human souls is malignant.* God had just placed Adam and Eve in the lovely garden of Eden. These two progenitors of the race were made in His image, were prepared for healthful toil, and for all innocent pleasure. They were happy in each other. They were supremely happy in their God. The new creation was their heritage. How malignant the person who can seek artfully to dim a picture so lovely, or destroy a happiness so pure. Only a fallen angel could have conceived the thought. Only a devil could have wrought it into action. He is unmoved by pity. His mission is the interruption of human enjoyment. And we see him fulfilling it on every page of human life and history. 3. *The tempter of human souls is courageous.* We almost wonder that Satan dared to venture into the new and lovely paradise which God had made for our first parents. Would not God expel him at once? Would not Eve instinctively recognize him notwithstanding his disguised appearance, and his bland approach to her. Might not such thoughts as these pass within his mind. If they did he would not long yield to them. Satan is bold and adventuresome. He will approach the first parents of the race, to seek their ruin, even though heaven may be their helper. He will tempt the Lord of the universe with the kingdoms of this world. He knows no tremor. He is best met by humility.

II. That the Tempter seeks to engage the human soul in conversation and controversy.—"And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden." Life is a beautiful garden in which man must find work, and in which he may find pleasure. But there are trees in it which are environed by Divine and requisite restrictions. The forbidden plants are known to man. They are revealed to him by the Word of God, and by his own conscience. Hence there can be no mistake. Man need not be taken unawares. But in reference to certain phases of human life Satan seeks to hold controversy with the human soul. 1. *He seeks to hold controversy with human souls that he may render them impatient of the moral restrictions of life.* He does not seek to talk to Eve about the tillage of the garden, or about the many trees of which she was at liberty to eat, but only about this *one* tree of which she and her husband were forbidden to partake. In this we see the devil's knowledge of human nature, and also the cunning of his fallen intellect. Men are far more impatient of their restrictions than they are mindful of their liberty, and hence are sensitive to any reference made thereto. Hence the great effort of Satan is to lead men astray not chiefly by questioning the theology of the Bible, but by directing their attention to the limits that it places upon their conduct. When you begin to question the right or wrong of any action, that is the first indication that Satan is seeking to hold a controversy with your soul, as you need never have a doubt as to whether you should eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. Never let the devil make you impatient of the laws of moral rectitude. When he reminds you of the one tree of which you may not eat, then show him all the other trees in the garden which are at your entire disposal. The restrictions of life are few, but they are real and far reaching. They relate to the destiny of the soul. 2. *He seeks to hold controversy with human souls that he may insidiously awaken within them thoughts derogatory to the character of God.* The woman in response to the serpent said that *God* had forbidden them to eat of the tree. Satan continues the argument from the same point. He states that God had told her a lie! Sin always commences here. The moment a soul holds controversy about the moral character of God, is the moment of its fall. The man who believes God to be untruthful, must and will be untruthful himself. We are good and safe in proportion as we reverence and love the character of God. Satan intimates to Eve that he knows as much about the tree as God did, and that she was justified in crediting his statement as much as the Divine. This is the one effort of the devil, to substitute himself to the human soul, in the place of God. He still seeks to make men worship him. 3 *He seeks to hold controversy with human souls that he may lead them to yield to the lust of the eye.* "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes," &c. This is the artifice of Satan, to get men to remove from the true basis of moral life. The true basis of moral conduct is, as Eve had just intimated, the Word of God. But now she is making desire the basis of her conduct. In the processes of temptation there are not merely the solicitations of the devil to lead the soul away from right, but there are also the brilliant appearances of the things we see. The tree is often *pleasant* to the eyes. Temptation always furnishes its dupe with an excuse. Eve saw that the tree was good for food. There is a gradual progress to sin. First you talk with the devil. Then you believe the devil. Then you obey the devil. Then you are conquered by the devil. Never make lust the basis of life. If you do you will fall irretrievably.

III. That the Tempter seeks to make one soul his ally in the seduction of another "She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." Eve little thought at the commencement of her interview with the serpent, what would be its end. One conversation with the devil may eternally ruin a soul. He is a pleasing interlocutor. But he is false. We observe that he tempted Eve first. He probably thought that he would the more readily win the weak one to his design. And when the devil lures a man's wife to evil, it is a bad omen for her husband. She will probably become his tempter. The domestic relationships of life are fraught with the most awful possibilities of good or evil to human souls. A wicked wife may be the moral ruin of a family. See the crafty policy of hell. Never join yourself in league with Satan to tempt another soul to evil. Satan is after all sadly effective in his work.

IV. That the human soul soon awakes from the subtle vision of temptation to find that it has been deluded and ruined. "And the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons." 1. *That the human soul soon awakes from the charming vision of temptation.* Temptation is a charming vision to the soul. The tree looks gigantic. The fruit looks rich and ripe, and its colour begins to glow more and yet more, then it is plucked and eaten. Then comes the bitter taste. The sad recollection. The moment of despair. To Adam and Eve sin was a new experience. It was an experience they would have been better and happier without. No man is the better for the woful experience of evil. 2. *That the human soul, awakening from the vision of temptation, is conscious of moral nakedness.* The tempter promised that Adam and Eve should become wise and divine, whereas they became foolish and naked. In the strange effort to become divine they became mortal. Sin always brings shame, a shame it deeply feels but cannot hide. How sad the destitution of a soul that has fallen from God. 3. *That the human soul awakening from the vision of temptation, conscious of its moral nakedness, seeks to provide a clothing of its own device.* Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together to make them aprons. Sin must have a covering. It is often ingenious in making and sewing it together. But its covering is always unworthy and futile. Man cannot of himself clothe his soul. Only the righteousness of Christ can effectually hide his moral nakedness.

> Jesus, thy Blood and Righteousness
> My beauty are, my glorious dress;
> 'Midst flaming worlds, in these array'd,
> With joy shall I lift up my head.

LESSONS:—1, *To beware of the subtlety of the devil.* 2. *Never to hold converse with Satan.* 3. *Never to yield to the lust of the eye.* 4. *Never to tempt another to evil.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. The Serpent.

Almost throughout the East the serpent was used as an emblem of the principle of evil. Some writers deny that the evil spirit is to be understood in this narrative of Genesis. Yet not only did the East in general look on the serpent as an emblem of the spirit of evil, but the earliest traces of Jewish or Christian interpretations all point to this. The evil one is constantly called by the Jews "the old serpent" (*Rev.* xii. 9). Some have thought that no serpent appeared, but only that evil one, who is called the serpent; but then he could not have been said to be "more subtil than all the beasts of the field." The reason why Satan took the form of a beast remarkable for its subtlety may have been that so Eve might be the less upon her guard. New as she was to all creation, she may not have been surprised at speech in an animal which apparently possessed almost human sagacity [*Speakers' Commentary*].

> "Fit vessel, fittest imp of fraud . . .
> . . . For in the wily snake
> Whatever sleights none would suspicion mark,
> As from his wit and nature subtlety
> Proceeding, which in other beasts observed,
> Doubt might beget of diabolic power,
> Active within, beyond the sense of brute."—
> *Paradise Lost.*

But to anyone who reads the narrative carefully in connection with the previous history of the creation, and bears in mind that man is here described as exalted far above all the rest of the animal world, not only by the fact of his having been created in the image of God and invested with dominion over all the creatures of the earth, but also because God breathed into him the breath of life, and no helpmeet for him was found among the beasts of the field, and also that this superiority was manifest in the gift of speech, which enabled him to give names to all the rest—a thing which they, as speechless, were unable to perform—it must be at once apparent that it was not from the serpent, as a sagacious and crafty animal, that the temptation proceeded, but that the serpent was simply the tool of that evil spirit who is met with in the further course of the world's history under the name of Satan. When the serpent, therefore, is introduced as speaking, and that just as if it had been entrusted with the thoughts of God Himself, the speaking must have emanated, not from the serpent, but from a superior spirit, which had taken possession of the serpent for the sake of seducing man. . . . The serpent is not a merely symbolical term applied to Satan; nor was it only the form which Satan assumed; but it was a real serpent, perverted by Satan to be the instrument of his temptation [*Keil and Delitzsch.*]

It has been supposed by many commentators that the serpent, prior to the Fall, moved along in an erect attitude, as Milton (*Par. L.* ix. 496):

> "Not with indented wave
> Prone on the ground, as since, but on his rear,
> Circular base of rising folds that tower'd
> Fold above fold, a surging maze."

But it is quite clear that an erect mode of progression is utterly incompatible with the structure of a serpent, whose motion on the ground is beautifully effected by the mechanism of the vertebral column and the multitudinous ribs, which, forming as it were so many pairs of levers, enable the animal to move its body from place to place; consequently, had the snakes before the fall moved in an erect attitude, they must have been formed on a different plan altogether. It is true that there are saurian reptiles, such as the *Saurophis tetradactylus* and the *Chamaesaura anguina* of South Africa, which in external form are very like serpents, but with quasi-feet; indeed, even in the boa-constrictor, underneath the skin near the extremity, there exist rudimentary legs; some have been disposed to believe that the snakes before the Fall were similar to the *Saurophis.* Such an hypothesis, however, is untenable, for all the fossil ophedia that have hitherto been found differ in no essential respect from modern representations of that order; it is, moreover, beside the mark, for the words of the curse, "Upon thy belly shalt thou go," are as characteristic of the progression of a saurophoid serpent before the Fall as of a true ophidian after it. There is no reason whatever to conclude from the language of Scripture that the serpent underwent any change of form on account of the part it played in the history of the Fall. The sun and the moon were in the heavens long before they were appointed "for signs and for seasons, and for days and years." The typical form of the serpent and its mode of progression were in all probability the same before the Fall as after it; but subsequent to the Fall its form and progression were to be regarded with hatred and disgust by all mankind, and thus the animal was cursed "above all cattle," and a mark of condemnation was for ever stamped upon it [*Students' Old Testament History, by Dr. Smith*].

The trial of our first progenitors was ordained by God, because probation was essential to their spiritual development and self-determination. But as He did not desire that they should be tempted to their fall, He would not suffer Satan to tempt them in a way which should surpass their human capacity. The tempted might therefore have resisted the tempter. If, instead of approaching them in the form of a celestial being, in the likeness of God, he came in that of a creature, not only far inferior to God, but far below themselves, they could have no excuse for allowing a mere animal to persuade them to break the commandment of God. For they had been made to have dominion over the beasts, and not to take their own law from them. Moreover, the fact that an evil spirit was approaching them in the serpent could hardly be concealed from them. Its speaking alone must have suggested that; for Adam had already become acquainted with the nature of the beasts, and had not found one among them resembling himself—not one, therefore, endowed with reason and speech. The substance of the address, too, was enough to prove that it was no good spirit which spake through the serpent, but one at enmity with God. Hence, when they paid attention to what he said, they were altogether without excuse [*Keil and Delitzsch*].

Wit unsanctified is a fit tool for the devil to work withal [*Trapp*].

1. The time of this temptation. 2 The place of this temptation. 3. The issue of this temptation.

The devil's advice:—1. It is freely given. 2. It is wofully misleading. 3. It is counter to the Divine command. 4. It is blandly proffered. 5. It is often taken.

It is the usual custom of Satan to tempt men before they are confirmed by habit in the course of goodness:—1. Because he envies man's happiness. 2. Because he hopes more readily to effect his mischief. 3. Let the newly converted prepare for him.

Satan contrives mischief against those who never provoke him.

No place nor employment can free us from the assault of Satan:—1. He tempted our first parents in Paradise. 2. Eli's sons in the tabernacle. 3. Christ in the wilderness.

Though Satan is the author of temptation he cares not to be seen as such.

Satan usually makes choice of those instruments which he finds fittest for the compassing of his own wicked ends.

Cunning persons are dangerous.

No advantage can assure a child of God from the temptations of Satan:—1. Not holiness. 2. Not the experience of God's mercies. 3. Not victories in past spiritual contests.

Satan:—1. His power. 2. His malice. 3. His cunning. 4. His diligence.

The devil's assistants:—1. Our lusts within. 2. Our world without. 3. Our own moral weakness.

Solitariness is many times a snare:—1. It yields advantage to temptation. 2. It gives the greater opportunity to commit sin unseen by men. 3. It deprives men of help by advice.

Satan's main end is man's destruction by turning away his heart from God.

It is usual with Satan and his instruments to pretend the good of those they intend to destroy:—1. Consider the being who makes the promise. 2. Seriously consider whether it is a real good promise. 3. Contemplate under what condition they tender the things to us.

It is a dangerous snare for a man to have his eyes too much fixed upon his wants.

The nature of man is apt by the art

and policy of Satan to be carried against all restraint and subjection.

Man's fall is as needful to be known as his best estate.

The devil may give forth a human voice to dumb and speechless creatures.

It is the devil's great plot in tempting man to destruction, to corrupt the mind.

Verse 2. It is dangerous to talk freely to persons of whom we have no knowledge.

It is a dangerous thing to debate evident and known truths.

Blasphemous suggestions ought not to be heard without indignation:—1. To manifest our zeal for God's honour and truth. 2. To secure ourselves from a further assault. 3. To prevent the hardening of the soul against wicked suggestions.

The goodness and bounty of God to men is a sad aggravation of sin.

Creatures must vindicate God's goodness, though Satan detract from it.

Man knows the innocent pleasures of life.

Verse 3. When we remember the law of God, we must set before us the sanction annexed thereto:—1. For God's honour. 2. For our necessity. 3. For our victory.

When we recall the law of God, we should remember the giver of it.

It is hard to bring man's heart to submit to, and bear with patience any yoke of restraint.

Whoever will not be entangled by allurements to sin, must not come near them.

The slighting of the curse of the law, makes way to the transgressing of the law.

Acknowledgement of God's law will more heartily condemn the soul that sinneth.

The least doubt about the truth of God's threatenings makes the soul more bold to sin.

"*Neither shall ye touch it.*" This is of the woman's own addition, and of a good intention doubtless. For afterwards, when she had drunk in more of the serpent's deadly poison, from gazing upon the fruit, she fell to gaping after it, from touching to tasting [*Trapp*].

THE FIRST LIE. Verse 4.

Sin entered our world by falsehood. As sin was thus introduced, so it has been very mainly sustained and propagated by lies; so says the Apostle John, and gives evidences of its truth.

I. At the author of this first lie. Satan—the devil—the deceiver—are the titles given him in Scripture, and Jesus says of him, He is a liar, and the father of lies, John viii. 44. No doubt this was scenic or dramatic, with the tree in sight, as the conversation was held. Here is the earthly fountain of falsehood, and the author of the first lie.

II. The nature of the lie uttered. "Ye shall not surely die." Observe, it was the direct falsification of God's threatening, in absolute contradiction of God's own Word. (Gen. ii. 17.)

III. It was a most daring and presumptuous lie. The height of desperate effrontery. A challenge of the Almighty. Bold collision with the God and Creator of the universe.

IV. It was a most malignant and envious lie. There can be no doubt that Satan saw and envied, and then hated the first human pair in their innocency and blessedness; and now, serpent like, he fascinates, and throws his horrid spell with fatal accuracy over the ready listeners, and then inserts the poisonous and venemous iniquity and ruin into the soul.

V. It was a destructive, murderous lie. So Jesus connects the first lie with the murder it effected. It slew our first parents—destroyed their innocency—blinded their minds—defiled their consciences—and overspread the soul with leprous defilement and guilt; and, as God had said, death not only arrested our first parents, and bound them with chains and fetters as guilty and condemned before Him.

VI. It was the germ of all unrealness and deception that should curse mankind. Now crookedness, illusion and deceit began their career. The false in all its forms and shades is traceable to this first lie. All ignorance—all error—all superstition—all base fear—all inward treason of heart, took their rise here. It poisoned the moral blood, degenerated the race, and introduced every hideous deformity and foul impurity into the human family and species.

VII. It was a lying entanglement from which humanity could not extricate itself Man could rush into darkness, but could not find his way back to light and day—he could fall, but not restore himself—he could die, by choosing to do so, but he could not resuscitate or raise himself again to life. The Divine image was effaced—the Divine Spirit exorcised—the soul in its original glory destroyed.

VIII. Jesus, the Divine Truth, came to deliver us from this lie and its results. He was immediately promised as the woman's conquering seed—He came, and was manifested to destroy the works of the devil—He overcame him in the wilderness, cast him and his demons out of the bodies and souls of men—He overthrew him on the Cross, entered his domains of death, and opened a royal passage through the tomb, and opened the gates of the second paradise to all believers. Hence, observe—

IX. The Gospel is the delivering power from Satan's falsehoods. Christ is the Author and Prince of truth—His Word is truth—He makes this Word His own power to salvation. This is the remedy for Satan's falsehood and malignity. By the Spirit and Word of Truth He regenerates, sanctifies, and makes meet for eternal glory. By this His saved people defy Satan, and overcome his machinations and lies. The kingdom of Christ is the kingdom of truth—this truth of Christ is to destroy the kingdom of Satan, and renew the world in true holiness, and bring down the Tabernacle of God from heaven to earth.—(*Dr. Burns.*)

Verse 4. Once yielding to the tempter's charm gives him greater boldness.

It is the devil's method to draw souls from doubting God's truth to deny it.

It is a strong delusion of Satan to persuade a sinner that he shall not die.

It is the initial property of the tempter to be a liar, to deny what God affirms.

The tempter deals in equivocations with double words and senses.

There is no truth of God so clear and manifest which Satan dare not contradict:—1. Because he is a liar. 2. Because it concerns him to contradict fundamental truths. 3. Because he understands the corruption of the human heart.

Satan never makes use of God's word, but for mischief.

Verse 5. Satan in all his promises gives men no ground to build upon but his own bare word.

Discontent at our present condition is a dangerous temptation of Satan:—1. Of unthankfulness to God. 2. Of disgust to our own heart. 3. Of envy with our neighbours.

Self love and seeking is one of Satan's most dangerous snares.

Satan tempts us to sin, not only in our pleasures and delights, but also in our duties:—1. Because then we feel most secure. 2. Because then he will corrupt our best endeavours. 3. Let us look carefully at the motive of our best duties.

The searching after the knowledge of unnecessary things is one of Satan's snares.

The special end that Satan persuades wicked men to aim at is that they may be as gods:—1. To excel alone. 2. To be independent. 3. To be commanded by none. 4. To give account to none.

It is Satan's policy to draw men to depend upon the creature, for that which only God can give.

Satan's preferments are abasements.

Hasty resolutions prove commonly dangerous in the issue.

The nearer things are to be enjoyed, the more strongly the heart is affected by them:—1. Then let us fix our eyes on our mercies. 2. Try to make the future present to our vision. 3. Think of the shortness of this present life.

It is a strong temptation on man to persuade enlightening by sinning.

In all the light pretended, Satan intends nothing but experience of nakedness and shame.

Verse 6. Man brought by Satan to unbelief is prepared for any wickedness.

Hearts slighting God's word are given up to Satan to believe lies.

Hearts so seduced call that good which God calls evil.

Unbelief makes souls judge that meat which is poison and death by God's word.

Unbelief stirs up lust in the eye, to that which we should loathe.

Forbidden things soonest stir up sinful desires.

Lust persuadeth there is wisdom to be had, where there is nothing but experience of evil.

The woman was first in the transgression, but the man equal.

Aggravated beyond all sin is the first transgression, being done wilfully, against such a God and such endowments.

Just is it with God to suffer men to fall, that choose it rather than steadfastness in his word.

Things usually appear to us as we stand affected toward them in our hearts.

It is dangerous to a man to fix his senses upon enticing objects.

Men are easily drawn to believe, and hope anything of that which they desire.

Man is an ill chooser of his own good.

It is not in the power of Satan to draw any man to sin without his own consent.

They that sin themselves are commonly seducers of others to sin.

One that is fallen into sin is many times most dangerous to his nearest friends:—1. Because they are apt to communicate the evil. 2. Because they are powerful to prevail with friends. 3. In daily commerce.

The Moral Aspect of the Senses.

Eden, whatever its geography, or physical characteristics, must be ever an interesting spot in the associations of humanity. Thither we trace our origin, our primitive greatness, our golden age, our ruin, and the first dawnings of redeeming love. Amongst the many suggestions with which this chapter is fraught, is the one contained in the text: *The moral aspect of the senses.*

I. That man requires a boundary for his senses. By prohibiting *one* tree, God declares that there must be a limitation to the gratification of the senses. This is a most important doctrine, and fearfully overlooked. But why should the senses be restricted? 1. *Because an undue influence of the senses is perilous to the spiritual interests of men.* The senses, as servants, are great blessings; as sovereigns, they become great curses. Fleshly lusts "war against the soul." 2. *Because man has the power of fostering his senses to an undue influence.* Unlike the brute, his senses are linked to the faculty of *imagination.* By this he can give new edge and strength to his senses. He can bring the sensual provisions of nature into new combinations, and thereby not only strengthen old appetites, but create new ones. Thus we find men on all hands becoming the mere creatures of the senses—intellect and heart running into flesh. They are carnal.

II. That man's moral nature is assailable through the senses. Thus Satan here assailed our first parents, and won the day. Thus he tempted Christ in the wilderness, and thus ever. His address is always to the passions. By sensual plays, songs, books, and elements, he rules the world. "Lust, when it is finished, bringeth forth sin." This fact is useful for two purposes:—1. *To caution us against all institutions which aim mainly at the gratification of the senses.* We may rest assured, that Satan is in special connection with these. 2. *To caution us against making the senses the source of pleasure.* It is a proof of the goodness of God that the senses yield pleasure; but it is a proof of depravity when man seeks his chief pleasure in them. Man should ever attend to them rather as means of *relief* than as sources of pleasure. He who uses them in this latter way, sinks brute-ward.

III. That man's highest interests have been ruined by the senses. "She took of the fruit." Here was the ruin. History teems with similar examples. Esau, the Jews in the wilderness, and David, are striking illustrations. Men's highest interests—of intellect—conscience—soul—and eternity—are everywhere being ruined by the senses.—*(Homilist.)*

Verse 7. It is a great folly in men not to foresee evil before it be too late to help it.

Even those who discover not beforehand the evils which the error of their ways lead them into, yet they shall in the end feel deep misery:—1. To bring them to repentance. 2. To make them more watchful in the future. 3. To give them a sweeter taste of God's mercy.

Sin is able to make the most excellent and glorious of all God's creatures vile and shameful:—1. It defaces the image of God. 2. It separates man from God. 3. It disorders all the faculties of the soul.

Men are more apt to be sensible of, and to be more affected by, the outward evils that sin brings upon them, than with the sin that causeth them.

Garments are but the covers of our shame:—1. For necessity—to keep off injury from the weather. 2. For distinction—of sexes—offices—degrees—nations.

Most of our necessities are brought upon us by shame.

Sin makes men fools.

All the care that men take is usually to hide their sin rather than to take it away.

Sin makes men very knowing in misery.

Sin strips stark naked of spiritual and bodily good.

Sin is ashamed of itself.

Sin is foolish in its patchings.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8—13.

THE SAD EFFECTS OF YIELDING TO TEMPTATION.

I. That yielding to temptation is generally followed by a sad consciousness of physical destitution. "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together and made themselves aprons" (Verse 7). Many a man has thought to enrich himself by yielding to the temptations of Satan, he has expected not merely to gain knowledge, but also social influence, commercial importance, and political advancement; but when the seduction has been accomplished, he has found himself poor, and blind, and naked. The best way to be rich is to be honest and good. The truest way to be socially influential is to be morally upright. The truest joys come to the purest souls. The great tendency of sin is to make men physically destitute, destitute of all that constitutes comfort. A sinner is exposed without any protecting garment to all the bitter experiences of life. Sin gives men many more wants than otherwise they would have. Upright souls have the fewest wants, and are the most independent of the external provisions of life. Most of the so-called civilization of nations is the outcome of sin, it is the apron of leaves to hide their nakedness.

II. That a yielding to temptation is generally followed by a grievous wandering from God. "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves." Adam and Eve had previously to this time held glad communion with God their Maker, but now they flee from Him. Sin makes men flee from the Infinite Being, and forsake the source of their truest spiritual joy. It introduces an element of fear into the soul. It makes men foolish in their attempts to hide from God. A forest of trees cannot conceal the guilty from the eye of heaven. 1. *After yielding to temptation men often wander from God by neglecting prayer.* When the fruit of the forbidden tree has been eaten men often begin to neglect their secret devotions. They try to banish all thought of God from their minds. The soul that holds converse with Satan, cannot long hold communion with God. 2. *After yielding to temptation men often wander from God by neglecting His Word.* When men have eaten the fruit of the forbidden tree they no longer like to read the Book which contains and makes known the restrictions they have violated. They are out of sympathy with the Book and its Author. 3. *After yielding to temptation men often wander from God by increasing profanity of life.* As the man first looked at the fruit of the forbidden tree, then touched it, then eat it; so now sin is a continued habit with him. He knows no shame. He feels no guilt. He responds not to the voice of God. We know not to what the first sin may lead.

III. That a yielding to temptation is generally followed by self vindication. "And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." 1. *We endeavour to vindicate ourselves by blaming others.* The husband tries to vindicate himself by blaming his wife; the sister by blaming her brother; the employer by blaming his partner; the clerk by blaming his companion; and so it seems to be the way of life for one man to excuse himself by rendering others culpable. (1). *This course of conduct is ungrateful.* Because all the relationships of life, whether domestic or commercial, are designed for our happiness. God gave Eve to Adam that she might be his companion and helpmeet. What could be more ungrateful than for man to charge his sin upon the woman who was designed to be a blessing to him, and in effect upon God? (2). *This course of conduct is ungenerous.* It is ungenerous to our relations. True they are culpable for trying to lead us away, but we are more so by yielding ourselves to be influenced by them counter to the command of God. We knew the right, and are not justified in blaming them because we did the wrong. (3). *This course of conduct is unavailing.* It will not excuse the sinner in the sight of God. It will not mitigate his guilt. It will not avert his punishment. It will not amend his doom. Let men honourably acknowledge the guilt of their own sin, and not strive to put it on the weaker party. 2. *We endeavour to vindicate ourselves by blaming our circumstances.* We indicate that our circumstances were unfavourable to our moral resistance. That Satan deceived us. That we were taken by surprise That we were morally weak at the time. Man has Divine aid to enable him to overcome his circumstances however perplexing they may be.

IV. That in yielding to temptation we never realize the alluring promises of the devil. 1. *Satan promised that Adam and Eve should become wise, whereas they became naked.* 2. *Satan promised that Adam and Eve should become gods, whereas they fled from God.*

THE DAWN OF GUILT. Ver. 7—13.

Here is the dawn of a new era in the history of humanity. The eye of a guilty conscience is now opened for the first time, and God and the universe appeared in new and terrible forms. There are three things in this passage which have ever characterised this era of guilt.

I. A conscious loss of rectitude. They were "naked." It is moral nudity—nudity of soul—of which they are conscious. The sinful soul is represented as naked (Rev. iii. 17). Righteousness is spoken of as a garment (Isa. lxi. 3). The redeemed are clothed with white raiment. There are two things concerning the loss of rectitude worthy of notice. 1. *They deeply felt it.* Some are destitute of moral righteousness, and do not feel it. 2. *They sought to conceal it.* Men seek to hide their sins—in religious professions, ceremonies, and the display of outward morality.

II. An alarming dread of God. They endeavour, like Jonah, to flee from the presence of the Lord. 1. *This was unnatural.* The soul was made to live in close communion with God. All its aspirations and faculties show this. 2. *This was irrational.* There is no way of fleeing from omnipresence. Sin blinds the reason of men. 3. *This was fruitless.* God found Adam out. God's voice will reach the sinner into whatever depths of solitude he may pass.

III. A miserable subterfuge for sin. "The woman," &c. And the woman said, "The serpent beguiled me," &c. What prevarication you have here! Each transferred the sinful act to the wrong cause. *It is the essential characteristic of moral mind that it is the cause of its own actions.* Each must have felt that the act was the act of self.—(*Homilist.*)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 8. The incidents narrated in this chapter, though inconceivably important, follow each other in rapid succession. Man is here brought before us—created—holy—fallen—condemned—redeemed. The consequence is, that each sentence is unspeakably full of meaning.

I. The sense of guilt by which they were oppressed. 1. There were circumstances which aggravated their guilt—they knew God—His fellowship—were perfectly holy—happy—knew the obligations—knew the consequences of life and death. 2. They felt their guilt aggravated by these circumstances. Their consciences were not hardened. Their present feelings and condition were a contrast with the past. In these circumstances they fled. They knew of no redemption, and could make no atonement.

II. The melancholy change of character which had resulted from their fall. 1. Our moral attainments are indicated by our views of God—progressive. The pure in heart see God. Our first parents fell in their conceptions of God—omnipresence. "Whither shall I go."

&c. This ignorance of God increased in the world with the increase of sin, Rom. i. 21—32. This ignorance of God is still exemplified. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." He may worship outwardly; and there are gradations of the foolish—some shut God within religious ordinances—some exclude Him.

III. That they had lost their communion with God. 1. One barrier interposed was guilt. 2. Another barrier was moral pollution.—(*Outlines of Discourses by James Stewart.*)

The voice of God pursueth sinners after guilt, sometimes inward and outward.

God hath His fit times to visit sinners.

Conscience hears and trembles at the voice of God.

Sin persuades souls as if it were possible to hide from God.

All carnal shifts will sin make to shun God's sight; if leaves do not hide it, the trees must.

God who hath all the wrong when He is provoked by our sins, is the first that seeks to make peace with us:—1. He allures us by His mercies. 2. By the sweet persuasions of His Spirit. 3. By the ministry of the Gospel. God in representing His Majesty to men so deals with them that he may humble but not confound them. God many times calls men to account, and proceeds in judgment against them in the midst of their delights. A guilty conscience is filled with terror, on every occasion we have no better refuge than to turn from sin to God.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 9. Satan's lie only gave occasion for the display of the full *truth* in reference to God. Creation never could have brought out what God was. There was infinitely more in Him than power and wisdom. There was love, mercy, holiness, righteousness, goodness, tenderness, long suffering. Where could all these be displayed but in a world of sinners? God at the first, came down to create; and, then, when the serpent presumed to meddle with creation, God came down to *save*. This is brought out in the first words uttered by the Lord God after man's fall, "And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, where art thou?" This question proved two things. It proved that man was lost, and that God had come to seek. It proved man's sin, and God's grace. "Where art thou?" Amazing faithfulness! Amazing grace! Faithfulness, to disclose, in the very question itself, the truth as to man's condition in grace, to bring out, in the very fact of God's asking such a question, the truth as to His character and attitude, in reference to fallen man. Man was lost; but God had come down to look for him—to bring him out of his hiding-place, behind the trees of the garden, in order that, in the happy confidence of faith, he might find a hiding-place in Himself. This was *grace*. But who can utter all that is wrapped up in the idea of God's being *a seeker?* God seeking a sinner? What could the Blessed One have seen in man, to lead him to seek for him. Just what the shepherd saw in the lost sheep; or what the woman saw in the lost piece of silver; or what the father saw in the lost son. The sinner is valuable to God; but why he should be so, eternity alone will unfold. (*Notes on Genesis, C.H.M.*)

The way to get our hearts affected with what we hear, is to apprehend ourselves to be spoken unto in particular.

God loves a free and voluntary acknowledgment of sin from his children when they have sinned against him.

God is full of mildness and gentleness in his dealings with offenders, even in their greatest sins.

All who desire to get out of their misery, must seriously consider what was the means that brought them into it.

Jehovah may suffer sinners to abuse His goodness, but he will call them to judgment.

God is not ignorant of the hiding places of sinners.

THE WANDERER FROM GOD.

I. Where is man? 1. *Distant from God.* 2. *In terror of God.* 3. *In delusion about God.* 4. *In danger from God.*

II. God's concern for him. 1. *His condition involves evil*—God is holy. 2. *His condition involves suffering*—God is love.

III. God's dealings with him. 1. *In the aggregate*—"Adam," the genus. 2. *Personally.* "Where art thou?" [*Pulpit Germs, by Wythe*].

Verse 10. All men are apt to colour and conceal all that they can even from God Himself.

One sin commonly draws on another:—1. The first sin weakens the heart. 2. Sins are usually fastened to each other. 3. God punishes one sin with another.

God's word is terrible to a guilty conscience.

It is a hard matter to get men to confess any more of their guilt than is self-evident.

Sinners pretend their fear rather than their guilt to drive them from God.

Sinners pretend their punishment rather than their crime to cause them to hide.

How hard it is to bring a soul to the true acknowledgment of sin.

Verse 11. The more sinners hide the more God sifteth them.

It is worth knowing by every man what discovers sin and shame. God therefore puts the question to Adam, to turn him to his own conscience, which told all God will bring sinners to a sense of sin before he leaves them, "Hast thou eaten?":—1. God's command aggravates sin. 2. God's small restriction aggravates sin. 3. God's provision of mercy aggravates sin.

Man's frowardness cannot overcome God's love and patience.

God can easily, without any evidence, convince men by themselves.

God accepts no concession till men see and acknowledge their sin.

Men must be dealt with in plain terms before they will be brought to acknowledge their sin.

A breach of God's commandment is that which makes any act of ours a sin.

Verse 12. When men's sins are so manifest that they cannot deny them, they will yet labour by excuses to extenuate them.

Men may easily by their own folly turn the means ordained by God for their good into snares for their destruction.

Sin is impudent to reply against God's conviction.

Sinners convicted, and not converted, are shifting of guilt from themselves.

God beareth long with the prevarications of sinners.

It was offensive to God that the woman should draw the man to sin.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13—21.

THE GENERAL RESULTS OF THE FALL OF OUR FIRST PARENTS.

I. The result of the fall of our first parents is an eternal enmity between Satan and humanity. "And the Lord God said unto the serpent, because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field: upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life; and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." We observe:—1. *That this curse was uttered in reference to Satan.* It is true that the serpent is here addressed, but merely as the instrument of the evil spirit. The punishment which came upon an irrational animal was symbolical of that permitted to Satan. Each became the object of a contempt which should be perpetual. That this language is used in reference to Satan is evident from the fact that the human race should triumph over the serpent which indication would have been unneedful had it merely referred to the reptile rather than the devil. Thus we learn that the agents of Satan are neither free from guilt or punishment. 2. *We observe that this address is* *different from that made to Adam and Eve.* God said to Adam, "Hast thou eaten of the tree;" and to Eve, "What is it that thou hast done?" But to Satan he puts no interrogation. And why? Because heaven knew that it was impossible for hell to repent, whereas man would be able under the proclamation of Divine mercy, to confess his sin and to receive forgiveness. The misery of Satan is irretrievable. For the sin of man there is provided a Divine remedy which he is urged to obtain. The questionings of God are merciful in their intention. Let us therefore penitently respond to them. 3. *We observe that there was to commence a severe enmity and conflict between Satan and the human race.* The serpent was no longer even the apparent friend of Adam and Eve, but their open enemy. Their recognized foe. The enmity of hell toward earth is well defined in God's word. It is thoroughly illustrated by the moral history of mankind. (1) *This enmity has existed from the early ages of the world's history.* Its rage and ruin were co-existent with the progenitors of the race, and was directed against their moral happiness and enjoyment. It did not commence in any after period of the world's history, and consequently not one individual has ever been exempt from its attack. (2) *This enmity is seeking the destruction of the higher interests of man.* It does not seek merely to injure the mental and physical sources of life, but the spiritual and eternal. It seeks to rob man of moral goodness, and of his bright inheritance beyond the grave. It endeavours to defile his soul. (3) *This enmity is inspired by the most diabolical passion.* It is not inspired by a mere love of mischief and ruin, not by a desire to have a gay sport with the welfare of man, but by a dire and all-conquering passion for his eternal destruction. This points to unremitting activity on the part of Satan. To inconceivable cunning. 2. *This enmity, while it will inflict injury, is subject to the ultimate conquest of man.* The serpent may bruise the heal of humanity, but humanity shall certainly bruise his head. Satan will be defeated in the conflict. His power is limited. Instance Job. Christ is his eternal conqueror, in Him the seed of the woman struck its most terrible blow. Thus the fall of our first parents has exposed humanity to the fierce antagonism of Satan. But this may be for our moral good, as the conflict has brought a Divine conqueror to our aid, it renders necessary—and may develop energies which shall lend force and value to our characters, and which otherwise would have remained eternally latent.

II. The result of the fall of our first parents is the sorrow and subjection of female life. 1. *The sorrow of woman consequent upon the fall.* "Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children." The combined command and blessing had been previously given, that the first pair were to be fruitful and multiply; but in innocency the propagation of their species was to be painless. This is reversed by their fall. The woman is to bring forth her progeny in sorrow. Sin is the cause of the world's physical suffering. This arrangement evinces the grand principle of vicarious suffering in human life. 2. *The subjection of woman consequent upon the fall.* "And he shall rule over thee." Eve had been guilty of insubordination, she had broken from the man to listen to the serpent, hence her punishment was adapted to her indiscretion. Women are to be subject to their husbands. This is the law of God. This is the ordination of physical life and energy. And any man who allows his wife to habitually rule him reverses the law of God, and the curse of the fall. But man's rulership is not to be lordly and offensive, but loving and graceful, thoughtful and appreciative. Under such a rulership the woman is a queen, herself the sharer of a royal life. These are the true rights of woman. If true to herself she wants no others. 3. *The subjection of woman consequent upon the fall gives no countenance to the degrading manner in which she is treated in heathen* *countries.* Man is not to crush a woman into a slave. He is not to regard her as his servant. She is his companion and helpmeet. Missions have done much for the social and moral elevation of woman.

III. **The result of the fall of our first parents is the anxious toil of man, and the comparative unproductiveness of his labour.** 1. *The anxious and painful toil of man consequent upon the fall.* Some people imagine that work is the result of the fall, and that if our first parents had retained their innocence all men would have been born independent gentlemen! This may be a nice dream for the idle, but it is far from fact. Adam worked before he yielded to temptation, he tilled and kept the garden. But then there was no anxiety, peril, or fatigue associated with his daily efforts. The element of *pain* which is now infused into work is the result of the fall, but not the work itself. Work was the law of innocent manhood. It is the happiest law of life. Men who rebel against it do not truly live, they only exist. All the accidents of which we read, and all the strife between capital and labour, and all that brings grief to the human heart connected with work, is a consequence of the fall. The excited brain should remind of a sinful heart. 2. *The comparative unproductiveness of the soil consequent upon the fall.* The ground was cursed through Adam's sin, and he was to gather and eat its fruits in sorrow all his life. By allowing Eve to lead him astray Adam had, for the moment, given up his rulership of creation, and, therefore, henceforth nature will resist his will. The earth no longer yields her fruits spontaneously, but only after arduous and protracted toil. The easy dressing of the garden was now to merge into anxious labour to secure its produce. Demons were not let loose upon the earth to lay it waste. The earth became changed in its relation to man. It became wild and rugged. It became decked with poisonous herbs. Its harvests were slow and often unfruitful. Storms broke over its peaceful landscapes. Such an effect has sin upon the material creation. 3. *The sad departure of man from the earth by death consequent upon the fall.* How long innocent man would have continued in this world, and how he would have been finally conveyed to heaven are idle speculations. But certain it is that sin destroyed the moral relationship of the soul to God, and introduced elements of decay into the physical organism of man. Hence after the fall he began his march to the grave. That man did not die immediately after the committal of the sin, is a tribute to the redeeming mercy of God. Sin always means death. Sin and death are twin sisters.

IV. **The grand and merciful interposition of Jesus Christ was rendered necessary by the fall of our first parents.** Man had fled from God. He could not bring himself back again. Man had polluted his moral nature by sin. He could not cleanse it. The serpent's head had to be bruised. Death had to be abolished. God only could send a deliverer. Here commenced the remedial scheme of salvation. An innocent man would not have needed mercy, but a sinful man did. Hence the promise, type, symbol, the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection and ascension, all designed by the infinite love of God to repair the moral woe of Eden's ruin. LESSONS: 1. *The terrible influence of sin upon an individual life.* 2. *The influence of sin upon the great communities of the world.* 3. *The severe devastation of sin.* 4. *The love of God the great healing influence of the world's sorrow.* 5. *How benignantly God blends hope with penalty.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 13, 14. No actor in any sin can escape God's discovery:—1. Adam is found out. 2. Eve is found out. 3. The serpent is found out.

God looks upon Satan as the author of the unbelief, rebellion, and apostasy of man.

The worst of curses hath God laid upon the old serpent, and that irrevocably.

God's curse upon the old serpent brings a blessing upon man.

God from the fall of man provided a way for saving some from the devil.

The promised seed had his heel bruised in killing the serpent's head. It was by His own dying, though He rose again.

Redemption is of free grace, and comes from God's promise.

Such grace binds to enmity with Satan and love to God.

BRUISING THE HEAD OF EVIL; OR, THE MISSION OF CHRISTIANITY.

Verse 15. That there are two grand opposing moral forces at work in the world, "the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent," is manifest from the following considerations:—1. *The universal beliefs of mankind.* All nations believe in two antagonistic principles. 2. *The phenomena of the moral world.* The thoughts, actions, and conduct of men are so radically different that they must be referred to two distinct moral forces. 3. *The experience of good men.* 4. *The declaration of the Bible.* Now in this conflict, whilst error and evil only strike at the mere "heel" of truth and goodness, truth and goodness strike right at the "head." Look at this idea in three aspects:—

I. As a characteristic of Christianity. Evil has a "head" and its "head" is not in theories, or institutions, or outward conduct; but in the moral feelings. In the likes and dislikes, the sympathies and antipathies of the heart. Now it is against this "head" of evil that Christianity, as a system of reform, directs its blows. It does not seek to lop off the branches from the mighty upas, but to destroy its roots. It does not strike at the mere forms of murder, adultery, and theft; but at their spirit, anger, lust, and covetousness. This its characteristic.

II. As a test of individual Christianity. Unless Christianity has bruised the very "head" of evil within us it has done nothing to the purpose. 1. *It may bruise certain erroneous ideas, and yet be of no service to you.* 2. *It may bruise certain wrong habits, and yet be of no real service to you.*

III. As a guide in propagating Christianity. The great failure of the Church in its world-reforming mission may be traced to the wrong direction of its efforts [*Homilist*].

Study the records of the Word. It is the history of the long war between the children of light and "the power of darkness." You will see that Satan has tried every weapon of the armoury of hell. He has no other in reserve But all have failed. They cannot rise higher than the heel. The head is safe with Christ in God. Mark, too, how a mightier hand guides his blows to wound himself. Satan's kingdom is made to totter under Satan's assaults. He brought in sin, and so the door flew open for the Gospel. He persecutes the early converts, and the truth speeds rapidly abroad throughout the world. He casts Paul into the dungeon of Philippi, and the gaoler believes, with all his house. He sends him a prisoner to Rome, and epistles gain wings to teach and comfort all the ages of the Church [*Archdeacon Law*].

Verses 15—19. **I.** Some important transactions related. 1. *The transgression which had been committed.* 2. *The scrutiny instituted* 3. *The sentence pronounced.*

II. The gracious intimations of the Text. 1. *Intimations of mercy.* 2. *Of the mode of mercy.* 3. *Our cause for gratitude.* 4. *Occasions for fear.* [*Sketches of Sermons by Wesleyan Ministers*].

Man's salvation is Satan's grief and vexation.

God's indignation is never so much kindled against the wicked, that He forgets His mercy toward His own.

God directs and turns the malice of Satan to the service of the good.

God will strengthen the weakest of His servants against Satan.

The greatness of man's sin is no bar to God's mercy.

God's means extend to future posterity.

Enmity and malice against good men is an evident mark of the child of the devil.

Christ the woman's seed:—1. Made under the law. 2. Became a curse for us. 3. Joined us to God. 4. Conquered Satan.

Verse 16. Though God has through Christ remitted to his children the sentence of death, yet He has not freed them from the afflictions of this life.

All the afflictions of this life have mercy mixed with them.

It is the duty of the wife to be subject to the will and direction of her husband:—1. There must be an order in society. 2. The woman was created for man. 3. She was first in transgression. 4. Man has the best abilities for government.

Womanly obedience:—1. Presented by God. 2. Easy for her. 3. Safe for her. 4. Ennobling to her.

Womanly subjection consists:—1. In outward obedience. 2. In the inward affection of the heart. 3. In thoughtful service.

Order in sin has an order in punishment. The woman is sentenced before the man.

Verse 17. Single account must be given by every creature for single sins. God takes one by one.

God Himself giveth judgment upon every sinner.

Man's excuse of sin may prove the greatest aggravation to the woman.

It is a sad aggravation of sin that it is committed against God.

The expressness of God's law doth much aggravate sin against it.

Sin brings all evil upon creatures, and makes them instruments to punish man.

All the creatures of the earth are under Divine command.

The short pleasure of sin draws after it a long punishment.

Verse 18. Thorns and thistles are the issues of sin.

As we are more or less serviceable to God, so we may expect creatures to be more or less useful to us.

Sin makes the course of man laborious and painful.

God remembers wretched man and allows him some bread though he deserves none.

Man's travail ends not but in the grave.

Verse 19.—"*Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*" How dreadful—how rapid—is the havoc of sin. A few chapters preceding man was wise—holy—now the crown is fallen we are all implicated (Heb. ix. 27).

I. The frailty of our Nature. 1. *Its origin.* However glorious our Maker, however exquisite the human body, God made that body of the dust of the earth. 2. *Its liability to injury.* No sooner born than fierce diseases wait to attack us. If not destroyed—injured—accidents. All the elements attack us. 3. *Its tendency to dissolution.* Behold the ravages of time. Human life has its spring, summer, autumn, and winter. (Ps. ciii. 14—15; xc. 5—6; xxxix. 4—5.

II. The certainty of our end. 1. *We are born to die.* Our first breath is so much of nature exhausted. The first hour we live is an approach to death. 2. *The perpetual exit of mortals confirms it.* 3. *God hath decreed it.* 4. *Learn rightly to estimate life.* (*Sketches of four hundred sermons.*)

I. Man's Origin. 1. *How wonderful.* 2. *How humbling.*

II. Man's Doom. 1. *Inevitable.* 2. *Just.* 3. *Partial.* 4. *Temporary.* (*Sermonic Germs by Wythe.*)

There is profit in all the duties which God enjoineth us. The disposing of man's life is in God's hand.

Verse 20—21.—It is fit in giving names to make choice of such as may give us something for our instruction. The very clothes we wear are God's provision. Necessary provision is as much as we can look for from God's hand:—1. For health. 2. For employment. 3. For possession. Our clothes are for the most part borrowed from other creatures.

In the midst of death God's thought has been to direct the sinner unto life.

God's goodness prevented sin from turning all man's relations into disorder.

Grace makes the same instruments be for life, which were for death.

God pities his creatures in the nakedness made by sin.

God makes garments where sin makes nakedness.

The mischief of sin is to forget nakedness under fine clothes.

A gracious providence puts clothes on the backs of sinners.

The guilty clothed:—1. By God. 2. With priceless robe. 3. For shelter. 4. For happiness.

We have here, in figure, the great doctrine of divine righteousness set forth. The robe which God provided was an effectual covering because He provided it; just as the apron was an ineffectual covering because man had provided it. Moreover, God's coat was founded upon blood-shedding. Adam's apron was not. So also, now, God's righteousness is set forth in the cross; man's righteousness is set forth in the works, the sin stained works, of his own hands. When Adam stood clothed in the coat of skin he could not say, "I was naked," nor had he any occasion to hide himself. The sinner may feel perfectly at rest, when, by faith, he knows that God has clothed him: but to feel at rest, till then, can only be the result of presumption or ignorance. To know that the dress I wear, and in which I appear before God, is of His own providing, must set my heart at perfect rest. There can be no permanent rest in aught else.—(*C.H.M.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 22—24.

THE EXPULSION OF MAN FROM EDEN.

Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden teaches:—

I. That when comforts are likely to be abused, God sends men from them. There was danger least Adam should put forth his hand and eat of the "tree of life" and live for ever. The fallen man must not be allowed to eat of the tree of life in this world. It can only be tasted by him in the resurrection; to live for ever in a frail body would be an unmitigated woe. There are many trees of life in the world from which God has to drive men, because they are not in a proper condition to make the designed use of them. Government and law must be preventive as well as punitive, they must regard the future as well as the past. It is better for a man to be driven from a mental, moral, or social good than that he should make a bad use of it. Many a soul has lost its Eden by making a bad use of good things.

II. That it is not well that a sinner should live and reside in the habitation of innocence. Adam and Eve were out of harmony with the purity and beauty of Eden. Such an innocent abode would not furnish them with the toil rendered necessary by their new condition of life. Men ought to have a sympathy with the place in which they reside. Only pure men should live in Eden. Society should drive out the impure from its sacred garden. Commerce should expel the dishonest from its benevolent enclosure. Let the wicked go to their own place in this life. A wicked soul will be far happier out of Eden than in it. Heaven will only allow the good to dwell within its walls.

III. That sin always causes men to be expelled from their truest enjoyments. Sin expels men from their Edens. It expels from the Eden of a pure and noble manhood. It drives the monarch from his palace into exile. It exchanges innocence for shame; plenty for want; the blessing of God into a curse; and fertility into barrenness. It makes the world into a prison-house. It often happens that when men want to gain more than they legitimately can, that they lose that which they already possess. In trying to become gods, men often lose their Edens. Satan robs men of their choicest possessions and of their sweetest comforts. This expulsion was (1). *Deserved.* (2). *Preventive.* (3). *Pitiable.*

IV. That though expelled from Eden man's life is yet beset with blessings. Though the cherubim and the flaming sword closed up the way to Paradise, Christ had opened a new and living way into the holy place. Christ is now the "way" of man—to purity—to true enjoyment—to heaven. Heaven substitutes one blessing for another.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 22–24. Jehovah is the disposer of all places and conditions; he sends in and puts out.

The cursed earth is the sinner's place of correction.

God has separated sin from pleasure. Sin is out of Paradise.

Terrible are the means by which God drives sinners from their pleasures.

God sometimes withholds blessings for our good.

When men have once committed sin, they are in danger of any other.

The surest way to prevent sin is to keep men from the allurements to it.

God cannot allow the defiling of His ordinances by such as have no right to them.

God likes to leave monuments both of His mercies and judgments.

THE PLAN OF REDEMPTION EXHIBITED AT EDEN.

By some it has been thought that the plan of redemption began to be unfolded in Eden in that symbolical appearance recorded in our text, receiving, as time rolled on, fuller development and additional illustration, until it was clearly set forth in the Saviour's mission.

I. The event here recorded. The expulsion of man from Paradise. 1. *It was not forcible.* The wording of the sentence would certainly lead us to infer the contrary, but we can scarcely suppose that the unwillingness of Adam to leave Eden would manifest itself in rebellious opposition, so as to induce coercive measures; besides, we may infer from the entire narrative, that he had been brought by this time to penitence. 2. *Neither are we to suppose that this event occurred merely as a carrying out of the curse which had been pronounced.* The sin of Adam no doubt was the ground of this exclusion, but the principal reason was, that access to the tree of life might be denied him. By this he was taught the full consequence of his sin.

II. The transaction that followed. "And he placed at the east of the garden," &c. The general mind associates with this statement, the idea of wrath; the popular notion being, that an angel with a flaming sword in hand, stood in the entrance of Eden, to prevent any approach to the tree of life. That such cannot be its import might be inferred from the general tenor of the narrative; in several instances, while Adam was yet *in the garden*, the mercy of God was especially manifested to him, and we cannot suppose that *after* his exclusion, there would be less mercy. To us it appears as an illustration of the recent promise of the Redeemer. 1. *What is the Scripture signification of the term "Cherubim?"* (Ezek. i. 22, x. 1.) (Rev. iv. 6.) The cherubim of paradise same as these. In Ezekiel, and in all the passages which refer to the subject, we have the idea that God dwelt with the cherubim; we are also told that the appearance of the cherubim was that of a man; so that one great truth taught at Eden might be, that the seed of the woman, who would open the way to the tree of life, would be God dwelling with the flesh. 2. *What was the flaming sword?* Critics tell us that the word rendered "flaming sword," might be rendered "the fire of wrath." Allow that the institution at Eden and the vision of Ezekiel represent the *same appearance*, and we have a key to the expression, "flaming sword." In the vision of Ezekiel there was a fire unfolding, or turning back upon itself; and the living creatures, with the likeness of a man, were in the midst of the fire. In the text, the sword of flame is said to have turned every way, but this would be better rendered "turning back on itself;" so that the great truth here taught was, that the fire of wrath, which had been kindled by transgression, instead of burning out to consume man, would turn back and expend itself on "God manifest in the flesh."

III. The design of this transaction. 1. One great end was to teach the principles of redemption. 2. To keep the divinely-appointed way to eternal life in remembrance. 3. That it might serve as a temple of worship. It was to this "presence of the Lord" that the antediluvian patriarch came—from which Cain was driven. Here sacrifices were offered, as expressions of faith in this way of reconciliation.—(*Sketches of Sermons by Wesleyan Ministers.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

BY

REV. WM. ADAMSON.

Death! Vv. 1—7. A heathen exercised his genius in the formation of a goblet, in the bottom of which he fixed a serpent, whose model he had made. Coiled for the spring, a pair of gleaming eyes in its head, and in its open mouth fangs raised to strike, it lay beneath the ruby wine. As Guthrie says: Be assured that a serpent lurks at the bottom of guilt's sweetest pleasure:—

"One drop of wisdom is far better
Than pleasures in whole bottomless abysses:
For sense's fool must wear remorse's fetter,
When duty's servant reigns where endless bliss is."—*Oriental.*

Sin! Vv. 1—7. Anthony Burgess says that sin is a Delilah, a sweet passion tickling while it stabs. Eve saw that the tree was pleasant to the eye, and from its fragrance likely to be good for food, a delicious morsel. Dr. Cuyler forcibly illustrates this by reference to the *Judas tree.* The blossoms appear before the leaves, and they are of a brilliant crimson. The flaming beauty of the flowers attracts innumerable insects; and the wandering bee is drawn after it to gather honey. But every bee which alights upon the blossom, imbibes a fatal opiate, and drops dead from among the crimson flowers to the earth. Well may it be said that beneath this tree the earth is strewn with the victims of its fatal fascinations: Yet

"'How can it be,' say they, 'that such a thing,
So full of sweetness, e'er should wear a sting?'
They know not that it is the very spell
Of sin, to make men laugh themselves to hell."

Open Eyes! Vv. 1—7. Sometime ago passengers in the streets of Paris were attracted to the figure of a woman on the parapet of a roof in that city. She had fallen asleep in the afternoon, and under the influence of somnambulism had stepped out of an open window on to the edge of the house. There she was walking to and fro to the horror of the gazers below, who expected every moment to witness a false step and terrible fall. They dared not shout, lest by awakening her inopportunely they should be only hastening on the inevitable calamity. But this came soon enough; for moving, as somnambulists do, with open eyes, the reflection of a lamp lit in an opposite window by an artisan engaged in some mechanical operation, all unconscious of what was going on outside, aroused her from sleep. The moment her eyes were opened to discover the perilous position in which she had placed herself, she tottered, fell, and was dashed below. Such is the sleep of sin; it places the soul on the precipice of peril, and when the spell is broken it leaves the sinner to fall headlong into the gulf of woe. Thus—

"No thief so vile nor treacherous as sin,
Whom fools do hug, and take such pleasure in."

Nakedness! Vv. 1—7. Their eyes were opened to see that they were not what they had been before. And we come to the same conclusion as we survey ourselves, that man is not the same creature with which God crowned the glorious work of creation. There is moral nakedness. He is like a creature of the air which a cruel hand has stripped of its silken wings. How painfully he resembles this hapless object which has just fallen on the pages of a book that we read by the candle on an autumn evening! It retains the wish but is conscious that it has lost the power to fly:—

"Soul, thou art fallen from thine ancient place,
Mayest thou in this mean world find nothing great,
Nor ought that shall the memories efface
Of that true greatness which was once thine own."—*Trench.*

Watchfulness! Ver. 1. I have read of a monarch that, being pursued by the enemy, threw away the crown of gold on his head, in order that he might run the faster. So, that sin, which thou dost wear as a crown of gold, throw it away, that thou mayest run the faster to the kingdom of heaven. Oh! if you would not lose glory be on your guard, mortify the beloved sin; set it as Uriah in the forefront of the battle to be slain. By plucking out this right eye you shall see the better to go to heaven. By cutting off this right arm you will be the more prepared for Satan. In such case you may confidently expect aid, for—

"Behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own."—*Lowell.*

Conditions! Ver. 1. No man is truly prosperous whose mortality is forfeited. No man is rich to whom the grave brings eternal bankruptcy. No man is happy on whose path there rests but a momentary glimmer of light shining out between clouds that are closing over him for ever. Satan makes many promises, but his conditions are equally numerous—and vastly more serious than his promises are precious. The Lord's temptation in the wilderness: Fall down and worship me! Ye shall be as gods! Such are the promise and condition—the one false, because the other devilish. His promises allure, and if we do not consider the conditions, the chances are against our resistance.

"The simple boy—far from his father's care,
Is well nigh taken with the gilded snare."
—*Holmes.*

Association! Ver. 2. Evil communications corrupt good manners! One day Robert's father saw him playing with some boys who were rude and unmannerly. In the evening he brought from the garden six rosy-cheeked apples, put them on a plate, and presented them to his son, who was much pleased, and thanked his father. "But you must lay them aside for a few days that they may become mellow." This was done, his father at the same time placing a seventh apple, which was quite rotten. To this the boy demurred on the ground that the decayed fruit would spoil all the others; but the father remarked: "Why should not the fresh apples make the rotten ones fresh?" Eight days afterwards the apples were brought forth—all of them equally decayed; whereupon Robert reminded his father of what he had said. "My boy, have I not told you often that bad companions will make you bad? See in the condition of the apples what will happen to you if you keep company with the wicked." Exactly so was it with Satan. Eve held intercourse with him, but did not make him better:—

"The tempting fruit outspread before her eyes,
Filled her with rapture and complete surprise;
Nor hidden dangers will she wait to see,
But onward hastens to the fatal tree."

Dread of Sin! Ver. 3. Holy fear is the door-keeper of the soul. As a nobleman's porter stands at the door and keeps out vagrants, so the fear of God stands and keeps all sinful temptations from entering. And if we only learn to fear God—*i.e.*, to stand in awe and sin not—in the right way, we shall learn at the same time never to fear anything else. The righteous are bold as a lion.

"Fear Him, ye saints, and ye will then
Have nothing else to fear."

Contamination! Ver. 4. In Adam all die. As the electric shock passes through the frames of all who are linked hand in hand, so passed the shock of sin's magnetic power of death through all the human race. As the poison imbibed by the lips flows through every vein of the body—penetrating its every vital part till death ensues, so the sin committed by our first parents has flashed its virus through every member of the human race:—

"One little sin that mystic cup did fill,
And yet it poured on, and poureth still
The *tainting* horrors of all pain and ill."
—*Alger.*

Indecision! Ver. 4. Some months ago, says a New York writer, I met a young Englishwoman who came to this city to marry a young man to whom she had been betrothed in England, and who had come to this country two years previous to engage in business. She was to marry him at the home of a friend of her mother's with whom she was staying. During the time she was making up her wedding outfit, he came to see her one evening when he was just drunk enough to be foolish. She was shocked and pained beyond measure. She afterwards learned that he was in the habit of drinking to excess. She immediately stopped her preparations, and told him she could not marry him. He protested that she would drive him to distraction; promised never to drink another drop, &c. "No," said the young maiden, "I dare not trust my future happiness to a drunkard. I came 3,000 miles, and I will return 3,000 miles." And she did. Had Eve but said: "No, I will not trust my future happiness to a maligner of God; get thee hence, Satan"—how different would this once fair world be now at this distant date! Yield to no offer, however tempting, which depends on, or is allied with, dishonour to God, disobedience to His statutes, or destructive to our immortal welfare.

"See yon tall shaft; it felt the earthquake's thrill,
Clung to its base, and greets the sunrise still"
—*Wendell.*

Gods! Ver. 5. If we are to credit the annals of the Russian empire, there once existed a noble order of merit, which was greatly coveted by the princes and noblesse. It was, however, conferred only on the peculiar favourites of the Czar, or on the distinguished heroes of the kingdom. But another class shared in its honour in a very questionable form. Those nobles or favourites who either became a burden to the Czar or who stood in his way, received this decoration only *to die*. The pin-point was tipped with poison—and when the order was being fastened on the breast by the imperial messenger, the flesh of the person was *accidentally* pricked. Death ensued, as next morning the individual so highly honoured with imperial favour, was found dead in bed from apoplexy. Satan offered to confer a brilliant decoration upon Adam and Eve; Ye shall be as Gods. It was poisoned: the wages of sin is death. As Bunyan says, look to thyself, then, keep it out of doors.

"'Tis like the panther, or the crocodile,
It seems to love, and promises no wile,
It hides its sting, seems harmless as a dove;
It hugs the soul, and hates when 't vows most love."

Vain Regrets! Ver. 7. A pointsman was on duty somewhere in America. The express was due; but instead of turning the points as he ought, and as day after day for many years he had done, he neglected his duty—the train rushed past in safety, as the engine-driver, guard, and passengers supposed. Alas! not so. In less time than you can read it all was a hopeless wreck, and not one of all that number in the train survived. And what of the poor pointsman, who that once (perhaps the only time) had neglected his duty? He rushed from the spot a hopeless maniac, and his incessant cry since that terrible event has been, "Oh! if I only had!" Nothing else has he said since; and probably for years to come that one sentence will ring through the room of the asylum where he is now confined.

"By the dark shape of what he is, serene
Stands the bright ghost of what he might have been."—*Lytton.*

Prayer! Ver. 8. Had Adam and Eve but hearkened to the pleading voice of their King! Had they but cast themselves in contrition at the feet of their King! When we sin, let us fear—but not *flee*. Let us denounce ourselves—but not despair. Let us approach the throne of that King who alone can help us. The throne to which we are invited is a "throne of grace," *i.e.*, favour. It is the source of power; but it is gracious power—merciful power—power to help in time of need. It is the highest pleasure of the King who sits upon this throne to dispense royal favour. Ancient kings could only be appointed on certain days; and then none dare come near on pain of death save those to whom the golden sceptre was extended. Our King sits upon the throne of grace day and night, and is always accessible—even to rebels against His government. Therefore let us come boldly—not run away to hide—that we may obtain mercy for the past rebellion, and grace to help us whenever again tempted to prefer Satan's hollow proffers to God's heavenly promises.

> "Words cannot tell what blest relief
> Here from my every want I find,
> What strength for warfare—balm for grief;
> What peace of mind."—*Elliott.*

The First Step! Ver. 9. Go, ask the culprit at the bar, or the felon in the prison, or the murderer awaiting the adjustment of the noose of the gallows-rope around his neck, to trace for you his wicked course of life; and, prominent in the black record, will stand out the story of his first act of disobedience to parents, of his first Sabbath-breaking, or of his first glass. Like links of a continuous chain, each act of iniquity in a wicked life connects the last and vilest with the "first false step of guilt." Beware of the beginnings of evil. They are the most dangerous because seemingly so harmless. How immense the evils which followed upon Eve's first false step! A few years ago, says Myrtle, a little boy told his first falsehood. It was a little solitary thistle-seed, and no eye but that of God saw him plant it in the mellow soil of his heart. But it sprung up—oh! how quickly! In a little time another and another seed dropped from it to the ground—each in turn bearing more seed and more thistles. And now his heart is overgrown with bad habits. It is as difficult for him to speak the truth as it is for a gardener to clear his land of the ugly thistle after it has gained a hold on the soil.

> "Let no man trust the first false step
> Of guilt; it hangs upon a precipice
> Whose steep descent in last perdition ends."

Self-knowledge! Ver. 9. They knew their condition. The degenerate plant has no consciousness of its own degradation; nor could it, when reduced to the character of a weed or wild flower, recognize in the fair and delicate garden-plant the type of its former self. The tamed and domesticated animal, remarks Caird, could not feel any sense of humiliation when confronted with its wild brother of the desert—fierce, strong, and free—as if discerning in that spectacle the noble type from which itself had fallen. But reduce a man ever so low, you cannot obliterate in his inner nature the consciousness of falling beneath himself. Low as Adam had sunk, there still remained, however dim and flickering, the latent consciousness and reminiscence of a nobler self, and so of the depths of degrading wickedness into which he had plunged himself.

> "Exiled from home he here doth sadly sing,
> In spring each autumn, and in autumn spring:
> Far from his nest he shivers on a wall
> Where blows on him of rude misfortune fall."

Divine Vision! (Ver. 8). Adam forgot that God could see him anywhere. Dr. Nettleton used to tell a little anecdote, beautifully illustrating that the same truth which overwhelms the sinner's heart with fear, may fill the renewed soul with joy. A mother instructing her little girl, about four years of age, succeeded by the aid of the Holy Spirit in fastening upon her mind this truth, "Thou God seest me!" She now felt that she "had to do" with that Being "unto whose eyes all things are naked," and she shrank in terror. For days she was in deep distress; she wept and sobbed, and would not be comforted. "God sees me, God sees me!" was her constant wail. At length one day, after spending some time in prayer, she bounded into her mother's room, and with a heavenly smile lighting up her tears, exclaimed, "Oh, mother, God sees me, God sees me!" Her ecstacy was now as great as her anguish had been. For days her soul had groaned under the thought, "God sees me; He sees my wicked heart, my sinful life, my hatred to Him and to His holy law;" and the fear of a judgment to come would fill her soul with agony. But now a pardoning God had been revealed to her, and her soul exclaimed exultingly, "God sees me, takes pity on me, will guide and guard me." No doubt Adam experienced this joy amid the briars and thorns of the wide, wide world (v. 23), which was denied him, and the vernal beauties and swimming fragrance of Eden, in the knowledge that he had

> "A Friend who will gather the outcasts,
> And shelter the homeless poor;
> A Friend who will feed the hungry
> With bread from the heavenly store."

Concealment! (Ver. 9.) Adam hid himself; but not where God could not see him. God saw the fugitives. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. This verse is felt to be like a glance at the Heart-searcher's eye if the conscience be quick, and the soul an object of interest. The most *microscopic* and the most mighty objects in creation are equally exposed to His scrutiny. Especially does He look man's heart through and through. "Hast thou eaten?" He examines—turns over all its folds—follows it through all its windings, until a complete diagnosis is obtained. "Thou hast eaten." God was a witness to it; so that the sinner in effect challenges the judgment of God:—

> "For what can veil us from thy sight?
> Distance dissolves before thy ray,
> And darkness kindles into day."—*Peter.*

Remedy! (Ver. 13.) The death was wrought; but God would evolve death out of life. When a vessel has all the air extracted from it and a vacuum formed, the pressure of the outside air on the surrounding surface will probably shiver it into a thousand pieces; but no man can restore that vessel. The pot ter may place the fragments in his engine, and mould out of them another vessel; yet it is not the same. But God can. God here declares He will. The remedy followed close upon the disease—the life upon the death. Near the manchaneel, which grows in the forests of the West Indies, and which gives forth a juice of deadly poisonous nature, grows a fig, the sap of either of which, if applied in time, is a remedy for the diseases produced by the manchaneel. God places the Gospel of Grace alongside the sentence of Death. He provides a remedy for man

> "To soothe his sorrows—heal his wounds,
> And drive away his fears."

Labour! Ver. 17. Dionysius the tyrant was once at an entertainment given to him by the Lacedemonians, where he expressed some disgust at their black broth. One of the number remarked that it was no wonder he did not relish it, since there was "no seasoning." "What seasoning," enquired the despot? to which the prompt reply was given: "labour joined with hunger." Krummacher narrates a fable of how Adam had tilled the ground and made himself a garden full of plants and trees. He rested himself with his wife and children upon the brow of a hill. An angel came and saluting them said: "You must labour to eat bread in the sweat of your brow, but after your toil, you rejoice in the fruit acquired." But Adam deplored the loss of Jehovah's nearness; whereupon the watcher replied that "toil was earthly prayer, the heavenly gift of Jehovah."—

> "Work for some good be it ever so slowly!
> Cherish some flower, be it ever so lowly!
> Labour! all labour is noble and holy;
> Let thy great deeds be a prayer to thy God."—*Osgood.*

Human Ruin! Ver. 17. Canning says that man is a dismantled fane—a broken shrine, and that there still lingers about him some gleams of his departed glory sufficient to give an idea of what he once was, and probably left as faint prophecy of what he will again be. You see, for example, a beautiful capital still bearing some of the flowers, and some vestiges of the foliage which the sculptor's chisel had carved upon the marble. It lies on the ground half-buried under rank weeds and nettles; while beside it the headless shaft of a noble column springs from its pedestal. As Guthrie asks: Would you not at once conclude that its present condition so base and mean was *not* its *original* position? You would say that the lightning bolt must have struck it down—or earthquake shaken its foundation—or ruthless barbarism had climbed the shaft—or time's relentless scythe had mown it down. We look at man and arrive at a similar conclusion. Like an old roofless temple, man is a grand and solemn ruin, on the front of which we can still trace the mutilated inscription of his original dedication to God. Yet he IS a ruin, and one which human skill cannot restore. The art of man may wreath it with ivy—may surround it with stonecrop and wallflower, yet he remains a ruin still—he though in nature's richest mantle clad

> "And graced with all philosophy can add;
> Though fair without, and luminous within,
> Is still the progeny and heir of sin."—
> *Cowper.*

Resurgam-hope! Ver. 14. All was not hopeless gloom. The cloud had its silver lining; and like Noah's thunderbank of water was arched by a brilliant Iris of comfort. It shall bruise thy head. Man would rise. In a Syrian valley grows a clump of trees stunted in their growth, with scarce one shade of resemblance to that noble group of stately cedars on the mountain ridge, the seeds from which had been planted in the vale by the agency of winds, and had shot up into these puny and repulsive trunks. But further on another cluster presents itself, which had been planted by the hand of man, carefully attended to as they grew up. These had a family likeness to that grove upon the hill slopes; and were giving promise of beauty and grandeur equal to that of their progenitors. The godless children of Adam resemble the stunted grove in the dell, with but feeble likeness to that of Adam in his sinless state; whereas the third clump symbolize the "renewed" sons of God, who, though immeasurably inferior as yet to the noble stock from which they were originally taken, are bearing evident marks of their parentage, and promise one day to attain to their high and heavenly origin:—

> "Born of the spirit, and thus allied to God,
> He during his probations term shall walk
> His mother earth, unfledged to range the sky,
> But, if found faithful, shall at length ascend
> The highest heavens and share my home and yours."—*Bickersteth.*

The Seed! Ver. 15. This seed, the Apostle says, was Christ. He is the great Deliverer and Champion. He is the great Legislator and Teacher. His name outshines all the names upon the "Roll of Fame." His name is above every name. In the Forum yonder stands a marble pillar of large circumference and lofty height. It rests upon a massive base, it is crowned with a richly-carved capital. And when a citizen has won some great victory for the state, has delivered it from a foreign foe or from domestic insurrection, has removed some gross abuse or inaugurated some beneficent reform, his name, by decree of the senate, is inscribed upon the pillar in letters of gold. And now that shaft glitters from top to bottom with shining names, all honourable, but the more honourable ever above the less. And gleaming at the top of the pillar is a name that outshines all the rest. So in the Forum of the kingdom of heaven stands a pillar blazing all over with beautiful names, and at the top a *name that is above every name*, "not only in this world but also in that which is to come." Therefore—

"He spends his time most worthily who seeks
this name to know;
Its ocean-fulness riseth still as ages onward
flow!"—*Canitz.*

Thistles! Ver. 18. How greatly the process of man's redemption from the curse—of his rise in morals and intelligence—is aided by this decree of Providence it would be difficult to estimate. 1. Did his food grow like acorns or beechmast upon long-lived trees, requiring no toil or care or forethought of his own, the most efficient means to his advancement would have been wanting. The curse would have deepened his degradation, instead of containing as it does now at its core the means of its removal—the inverse aid of man's physical and spiritual progress. 2. It has been observed that the very instruments of man's punishment—the very goads that prick him on to exertion—are after all stunted or abortive forms of branches, or of buds which in happier circumstances would have gone on to develop fruit, and that the downy parasols by means of which thistles spread their seeds in myriads are due to degeneration of floral parts; so that they witness to man continually of his own degradation, inasmuch as they—like himself—are failures on the part of nature to reach an ideal perfection.

Contrast! Ver. 19. A traveller in Syria notes that on a mountainous ridge his attention was called to a magnificent grove of trees of the cedar species. They were evidently the growth of many ages, and had attained the perfection of beauty and grandeur. As he descended into the vale, he beheld a number of other trees stunted in their growth, and as remarkable for their meanness as the former were for their magnificence. The guide assured him that they were of the same species; yet not a trace of resemblance could he find in them. This appears to be a remarkable emblem of Adam. In Chap. II. the power of body, mind and spirit resemble the cluster of stately cedar-pines; whereas, when we descend into the valley of sin in Chap. III., we observe that, like the scattered trees in the vale, his mental and moral powers are stunted in their growth—mean, despicable, and well-nigh useless. Of him we may exclaim that he was planted a noble vine, but how is he turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine! Whose fault?

"Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of Me
All he could have; I made him just and
right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
—*Milton.*

Dust of Death! Ver. 19. Dust may be raised for a little while into a tiny cloud, and may seem considerable while held up by the wind that raises it; but when the force of that is spent, it falls again, and returns to the earth out of which it was raised. Such a thing is man; man is but a parcel of dust, and must return to his earth. Thus, as Pascal exclaims, what a chimera is man! What a confused chaos! And after death, of his body it may be said that it is the gold setting left after the extraction of the diamond which it held—a setting, alas! which soon gives cause in its putrescence for the apostrophe: How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed! Yet "there is hope in thine end," O Christian gold, however dimmed. There is a "resurgam" for thy dust, O child of God!

"The fine gold has not perished, when the
flame
Seizes upon it with consuming glow;
In freshn'd splendour it comes forth anew
To sparkle on the Monarch's Throne or
BROW."—*Bonar.*

Promises! Ver. 21. Deeds are more powerful expressions than words; but this Divine act of clothing Adam and Eve in "robes of blood-shedding" could have no intelligent force to them without a revelation. Is it unreasonable to suppose that God explained to them the meaning of that prophetic decree in ver. 15: "It shall bruise thy head"? When the scarlet-dyed raiment was placed by Divine direction upon the bodies of Adam and Eve, Jehovah explained the symbolism, and unfolded promises of mercy through free sovereign grace in response to Faith. Adam and Eve laid hold of those promises, and cast themselves unfeignedly on His mercy. This would brighten their otherwise dark pathway. When a pious old slave on a Virginian plantation was asked why he was always so sunny-hearted and cheerful under his hard lot, he replied, "Ah, massa, I always lays flat down on de *promises*, and den I pray straight up to my hebenly Father." Humble, happy soul! he was not the first man who has eased an aching heart by laying it upon God's pillows; or the first man who had risen up the stronger from a repose on the unchangeable word of God's love. If you take a Bank of England note to the counter of the bank, in an instant that bit of paper turns to gold. If we take a promise of God to the mercy-seat, it turns to what is better than gold—to our own good and the glory of our Father.

Privileges Perverted! Ver. 22. Pilkington mentions that in Retsch's Illustrations of Göethe's Faust, there is one plate where angels are seen dropping roses down upon the demons, who are contending for the soul of Faust. But every rose falls like molten metal—burning and blistering where it touches. Is it not so with man? God's gifts are by him abused—His privileges perverted. The gifts remain intrinsically the same; but man's heart—his guilty conscience is pained; as vice blushes at virtue's contact.

"Wasted and marred in the sin-stricken soul,
The finest workmanship of God is there."
—*Willis.*

Divine Care! (Ver. 23.) God did not

forget Adam and Eve. Nor was He indifferent to their constitution. Life in Paradise would be extreme misery. He saw—he knew. So God sees all the way of each child of His. And as he taught Adam and Eve that His Providence and love would guide and direct their future, so does He teach us. Dr. Doddride was taught this in a dream. He thought he had just died, and in an instant was conscious that he was free as a bird. Embodied in an aërial form he floated in light, while beneath was his family weeping over his dead body, which he had just left as though it were an empty box. Reposing upon golden clouds, he found himself ascending through space, guided by a venerable figure, in which age and youth were blended into majestic sweetness. They travelled on and on. At length the towers of a most beautiful edifice rose, brilliant and distinct, before them. The door swung noiselessly open as they entered a spacious room, in the centre of which stood a table covered with a snow-white cloth, on which was a golden cup and a cluster of ripe grapes. "Here you must await the Lord of the mansion, who will soon come," said the guide. "In the meantime, you will find plenty to delight you." His guide vanished; and upon looking at the room, he found its walls covered with pictures, which, upon examination, proved to be a complete delineation of his entire life, revealing to him that there had not been an hour in it of joy, sadness, or peril, in which a ministering angel had not been present as guardian and Saviour. This revelation of God's goodness and mercy and watchfulness far exceeded his highest imaginings. While he was filled with gratitude and love, the Lord of the mansion entered. His appearance was so overwhelming in its loveliness and majesty, that the dreamer sank at his feet overcome. His Lord, gently raising him, took his hand and led him forward to the table. Pressing the juice of the grapes into the golden cup, he first tasted it, then holding it to the dreamer's lips, said, "Drink: this is the new wine in my Father's kingdom." No sooner had he drank, than *perfect* love cast out all fear, and clasping his arms around the Saviour, he exclaimed "My Lord and my God!" Sweeter than the sweetest of earth's music, he heard the voice of God His Saviour in accents of comfort and tones of assurance; and, thrilling with unspeakable bliss, he awoke with tears of rapture streaming over his face. Yes! God sees—knows—pities—preserves—perfects.

"Through all my dark has shone Thy face,
Thy peace has flowed beneath my pain;
Stumbling, I fell in Thy embrace
My loss by Thee was turned to gain."

Mercy and Judgment! Ver. 24. Mercy here fringed the judgment of exclusion. Man now required an occupation to prevent unavailing regrets. Naturally prone to mood over the past, God gave him an employment which would draw his mind away from past memories to present action and future hope. Regrets of a certain class are useless. As for instance those which a man in mid-life sometimes experiences. It is the solemn thought connected with middle life, that life's last business is begun in earnest; and it is then, midway between the cradle and the grave, that a man begins to marvel that he lets the days of youth go by so half-enjoyed. It is the pensive autumn feeling; it is the sensation of half-sadness that we experience when the longest day of the year is past, and every day that follows is shorter, and the light fainter, and the feebler shadows tell that nature is hastening with gigantic footsteps to her winter grave. So does man look back upon his youth. When the first gray hairs become visible, when the unwelcome truth fastens itself upon the mind that a man is no longer going up hill, but down, and that the sun is always westering, he looks back on things behind. When we were children, we thought as children. But now there lies before us manhood, with its earnest work, and then old age, and then the grave, and then home. There is a second youth for man, better and holier than the first, if he will look on and not look back. Hence God sent forth Adam to till the ground, to devote his energies to diligent use of the present, by directing his hopes toward heavenly rest in the future. And if we could have his confession now it would be:—

"Yes, I can tell of hours apart
In lonely path and secret place,
When burned and glowed within my heart
The wondrous meanings of Thy grace."

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. **Gotten a man from the Lord.**] Or, perhaps, "Gotten a man, even Jehovah." The rendering of the A. V. is no doubt the one more generally followed. Leeser and Murphy have, "from the Lord"; Young, "by the Lord"; Gesenius, "by the aid of Jehovah"; Davies, "with the Eternal," *i.e.*, "with His presence and help"; in like manner the Sept. renders the words, διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ; and the Vulg. *per Deum*. Lange is dissatisfied with this translation as "too weak," and proposes to read: "a man, with Jehovah"; "that is," he says, "one who stands in connection with Jehovah. . . . In the blessed confidence of female hope, she would seem, with evident eagerness, to greet, in the new-born, the promised woman's seed (ch. iii. 15) according to her understanding of the word." We are not surprised that Prof. Tayler Lewis (in Lange's Genesis) should pronounce even "with Jehovah" a harsh and difficult rendering; and that the juxtaposition of "*'eth* Cain" "*'eth* Jehovah" ("she bare *'eth* Cain, and said, I have gotten a man *'eth* Jehovah") seems to shut us up to the rendering: "I have borne a man, the very Jehovah, or, I have borne a man, the very God, the very Jehovah." There are, in truth, three considerations which must be well weighed in order to appreciate at its just value the evidence in favour of this last rendering. (1.) The meaning of the name Jehovah (Yahweh); for which we must refer to "Critical Notes" on Ch. ii. and on Ex. iii. From the exposition there given it will be seen that this name of covenant grace was not wholly inapplicable to the woman's promised seed, and did certainly, in a general way, comprehend the promise of the redemption. (2.) The common usage of the particle *'eth* ("*'eth-Yahweh*") in which it is much more frequently "a sign of the definite accusative" than anything else. In other words, "I have gotten a man even Yahweh" is *the* rendering suggested at first sight of the original. (3.) The error of Eve on one point does not convict her of error on another. Her exclamation, rendered as now suggested, assumes *two* things:—(*a*) That the promised seed would be Yahweh himself; and (*b*) that this her first-born was the promised seed. Her pardonable error as to (*b*), in no way brings discredit on her persuasion as to (*a*). And be it remembered that the naturalness of such an exclamation—not its entire correctness—is sufficient to remove any objection from this source to the translation before us. On the whole, we are constrained to regard this as the better translation.—7. **Sin lieth at the door.**] Rather: "A sin-offering is crouching at the door, or (more generally) opening": *e.g.* "at the opening, or entrance, of thy brother's fold." This exegesis supplies a point of departure for the words which immediately follow, and which otherwise seem exceedingly abrupt. The connecting link may be shown by the following paraphrase:—"Though, in order to do well, thou must needs own thyself a sinner, and be indebted to thy brother for a sin-offering out of his fold; yet this will not destroy thy rights as first-born: NOTWITHSTANDING, TO THEE *shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.* Let not pride, therefore, deter thee from this better—this only proper—way. Let no obstinacy, no groundless fears, keep thee from thus *doing well.*" Much has been written on this passage, and many are the views of it that have been propounded; but, without dogmatising, we may express our pretty confident persuasion that no exposition so fully meets the case as the above.—23. **Adah and Zillah.**] Probably the oldest fragment of poetry extant. With a slight freedom of translation, we may perhaps thus approach the metrical cast of the original:—

"Adah and Zillah! hear ye my voice,
Ye wives of Lamech! give ear to my tale:
A MAN have I slain in dealing my wounds,
Yea, a YOUTH in striking my blows:
Since SEVENFOLD is to be the avenging of Cain,
Then, of LAMECH, seventy and seven!"

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1, 2.

DOMESTIC LIFE.

I. **That it is designed for the numerical increase of humanity.** *The position of Adam and Eve prior to the birth of their two sons was unique.* They were alone in the great world. In Eden they would not be so deeply conscious of this solitude, as there their solitude was filled with God and holy thoughts. But, now, in their altered condition of life, they would feel more keenly the need of earthly companionship. Their intercourse with Jehovah is not so easy and natural as it used to be, and, as they cannot live without fellowship, they would hail with joy the birth of a son. It is the tendency of fallen manhood to supply the place of the Divine with the human, to substitute earth for heaven. Parental loneliness is a grief to many. Their home rings not with the happy voice of childhood. But still it is impossible that any parents now can be lonely as the progenitors of our race. The intellectual, and social, and moral companionships of the outside world are too numerous to leave domestic life in solitude. 2. *The position of Adam and Eve prior to the birth of their two sons was interesting.* They are now in a great crisis of their lives. They have passed through all the bitter experiences of sin. They have become cognizant of Satanic influence. They are fallen creatures. They have been driven from the supreme enjoyments of a holy life and residence into the struggle of a hard life. Yet they are encircled by Divine mercy. How will they act? In what manner and spirit will they conduct their new and arduous life? Will they push further in sin, or will they begin their domestic life in purity and hope? How will their recent sin affect their rising progeny? These and kindred questions invest the position of Adam and Eve at this time with deep and extraordinary interest. Hence the domestic relations of life were intended to people the country, to provide men from the intellectual, commercial and moral pursuits of life.

II. That it should be careful as to the nomenclature of its children. Eve's first-born was called "Cain," her next son was designated "Abel." We observe that: 1. *Child nomenclature should be appropriate.* The name Cain signifies *possession.* Eve regarded her first-born son with delight. He was her property. Some parents only regard their children as so much property, as worth so much to them in the labour market. But Cain was to our first parents a moral possession. They regarded him as the gift of God. Children are the most happy, and yet the most solemn and responsible possession of domestic life. They are not to be regarded as "encumbrances," but as capable of healthy work and sublime moral destiny. They are to be well cultured. They ought to increase the spiritual value of the home to which they belong. They ought to be trained for the God from whence they came. Give them appropriate names, expressive of their early dispositions, their infantile circumstances, or of some holy thought connected with the providence of God in your history. 2. *Child nomenclature should be instructive.* While the name of Cain signified possession, that of Abel signified *vanity.* Many conjectures have been offered as to the reason of the name given to Abel. The probability is that our first parents were getting into the painful experiences of life, and embodied their verdict of it in the name of their child. Thus the name of their second son gathers up the history of their past, and the sorrows of their present condition. It would ever be a monitor to both child and parents. When either is tempted to be led away by earthly things, it would serve to remind them of their vanity. It is well to have Scriptural names in a family. They are deeply instructive. 3. *Child nomenclature should be considerate.* The names that parents sometimes give to children, while they are appropriate, instructive, and prophetic, should always be in harmony with good taste and refined judgment. Some parents give their children several names, as if one or two were not enough to distinguish them, or as if they wished to give them good practice in writing in future days. How many men are ashamed of the uneuphonious and jaw-breaking names that have been given to them in childhood. Hence parents should be considerate in the domestic nomenclature of their offspring. Let their names be pictures of goodness, and patterns of truth.

III. That it should judiciously bring up children to some honest and helpful employments. 1. *These two brothers had a daily calling.* They were not allowed to idle away their time at home, without instruction to prepare them for the active duties of life, or without work to develop their growing and youthful energies. Every young man, irrespective of his social position, or great expectations, ought to be brought up to some useful employment. The world invites his effort. Commerce is calling for it. Art would prize it. Literature would repay it. Heaven will reward it. Indolence is the curse of family life. 2. *Each of these brothers had his distinctive calling.* Abel was a keeper of sheep. Cain was a tiller of the ground. Thus the two brothers were not engaged in the same pursuit. It is well for a family to cultivate within itself all the employments of civilized life. Then one member of it becomes the happy compliment of another, and all are in a state of comparative independence. Some men look down on the agriculturalist. They have no reason to. It is the most ancient trade. It is most honourable. It is mediatorial in its character, for it takes the gifts from the hand of God to distribute them to supply the wants of humanity. This should evoke gratitude. 3. *These brothers had a healthful calling.* Both of them worked in the open air. Some parents allow their boys to be confined in sultry offices, or in ill-ventilated workshops, where physical manhood is weakened by daily labour. Men should study health in their secular pursuits. Work ought to strengthen rather than weaken. 4. *These brothers had a calling favourable to the development of intellectual thought.* Shepherds, and tillers of the ground, ought to be men of great souls, and sublime ideas. They are students of nature. Their daily occupation brings them near to God. Many of the Psalms are the outcome of a shepherd life.

IV. That it should not be unmindful of its religious obligations. "And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof." 1. *These offerings are rendered obligatory by the mercies of the past.* This first family had received many blessings at the Divine hand. Their spared lives. Their increasing family. Their fruitful gardens. It was natural that they should be inspired with the idea of religious worship. There is not a family in the world but has reason to worship God. 2. *These offerings should be the natural and unselfish outcome of our commercial prosperity.* Cain and Abel were prosperous in their avocations, and hence it was only natural and right that they should offer to God the fruit of the earth and the firstlings of the flock. The first fruits of trade should be presented to the Lord. They are His due. It would show our unselfish reception of His gifts. It would enrich His church, and aid His moral enterprise in the world. 3. *These offerings ought to embody the true worship of the soul.* People say that they can worship God without giving him anything. They sing His praise, they pray to Him, but they never give to Him the firstlings of their flocks. They are wealthy, yet they give the Lord nothing. Their worship is a mockery. If their prayers were true, their gifts would be ready. In such a case the gift is the measure of the prayer. The poor widow will give her mite. The penitent heart will give itself. Lessons:—1. *That domestic life is sacred as the ordination of God.* 2. *That children are the gift of God, and are often prophets of the future.* 3. *That working and giving are the devotion of family life.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1, 2. Providence has distinguished men from their first birth into the world.

The propagation of the human race is outside of Paradise, not because it is first occasioned by sin, but rather because it supposes a distinct development of mankind, and is tainted with its sin [*Lange*].

Adam had, no doubt, already commenced both occupations, and the sons selected each a different department. God himself had pointed out both to Adam—the tilling of the ground by the employment assigned him in Eden, which had to be changed into agriculture after his expulsion; and the keeping of cattle in the clothing which He gave him (iii. 21). Moreover, agriculture can never be entirely separated from the rearing of cattle; for a man not only requires food, but clothing, which is procured directly from the hides and wool of tame animals. The different occupations of the brothers, therefore, are not to be regarded as a proof of the difference in their dispositions. This comes out first in the sacrifice, which they offered after a time to God, each one from the produce of his vocation [*Keil and Delitzsch.*]

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 3—8.

THE TRUE AND FALSE WORSHIPPER OF GOD.

I. That both the True and the False amongst Men are apparently Worshippers of God. Both Cain and Abel came to worship God. The false come to worship God. 1. *Because it is the custom of the land so to do.* The sabbath morning dawns, and the world of mankind awakes to the religious service of the day. All classes and conditions of men are seen wending their way to the temple of God. They reverence not the day. They join not heartily in its worship. They are the slaves of custom. They are the creatures of habit. Hence you cannot distinguish the moral character of men by the mere fact of worship. Attendance to the outward ceremonial of religion is not an infallible index to their piety or heavenly aspirations. 2. *Because men feel that they must pay some regard to social propriety and conscience.* Men would feel if they did not bring the first fruits of their religious service to God that they were little better than heathens. This to them is a social propriety. They would not disgrace their characters by an avowed neglect of the sabbath, or by a rejection of all moral worship. They always attend church once a day. This is their sabbath etiquette. This silences their conscience, preserves their reputation, and constitutes them moral and respectable people. Hence they bring their firstlings to the Lord. These are the false worshippers of God, and with them the sanctuaries of the world are crowded. They are Cainites. 3. *Because men feel that their souls are drawn out to God in ardent longings and grateful praises.* These are the true worshippers of God. They are in the minority. They are followers of Abel. They gladly welcome all the means of grace They joyfully present their firstlings to the Lord. They come to God in his appointed way. They are animated by the true spirit of devotion.

II. That both the True and the False amongst men present their material offerings to God. Cain and Abel not merely came together to worship God, but they also brought of their substance to the Lord. Cain brought of the fruit of the ground. Abel brought the firstlings of his flock. 1. *The trade of each brother suggested his offering.* This was most natural. The trades, the temperaments, and the abilities of men, generally determine their kind of religious service and devotion. The men of great intellect will take to God the firstlings of a splendid literature. The man of great emotion will take to God the offerings of an enthusiastic prayer. The man of great wealth will take silver and gold. The man of leisure will give his time. The man of genius will give his originality. The poor man will give himself. Hence there are few men who neglect to give some offering to the Lord. (1.) *Some take their offerings for parade.* They never take small offerings that can be concealed. Their offerings always go in droves, that men may see them, admire them, and inquire about them. They have no true piety to inspire society with respect, hence they substitute ostentation, and a pretence of goodness in its place. They will give ten thousand pounds to build a church, when privately they would not give ten shillings to save a soul. (2.) *They take their offerings to enhance their trade.* They want to be known as great church goers, as men of benevolent disposition. Thus they hope to increase their financial returns, and to strengthen their business relationships. Their offerings to God are nothing more than investments for themselves. (3.) *They take their offerings to increase their social influence.* (4.) *They take their offerings with a humble desire to glorify God.* These are the offerings of a true manhood. They are the outcome of a penitent soul. They only are acceptable to heaven. Thus as you cannot estimate the moral character of a man by his worship, neither can you by the material offerings he presents to the Lord.

III. That both the true and the false amongst men are observed and estimated by God in their worship and offerings. 1. *The worship and offerings of the one are accepted.* "And the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering." And why :—(1.) *Because it was well and carefully selected.* Men should select carefully the offerings they give to God. (2.) *Because it was the best he could command.* He brought the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. When men are searching their flocks for the Lord's offering, they generally take the poorest they can find. The threepenny piece is enough. (3.) *Because it was appropriate* His sacrifice preached the gospel, foreshadowed the cross. (4.) *Because it was offered in a right spirit.* This makes the great point of difference between the two offerings. The grandest offerings given in a wrong spirit will not be accepted by God, whereas the meanest offering given in lowly spirit will be welcome to him. Thus the younger brother was the best. He was better than his name. (2.) *The worship and offering of the other was rejected.* "But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." The men who make their religious offerings a parade, who regard this worship as a form, are not welcomed by God.

IV. That the true, in the Divine reception of their worship and offerings, are often envied by the false. 1. *This envy is wrathful.* "Why art thou wrath." 2. *This envy is apparent.* "Why is thy countenance fallen." 3. *This envy is unreasonable.* "If thou doest well, shalt thou be accepted." 4. *This envy is murderous.* "Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 3. Sin, however it made man apostate from God, did not extinguish his worship of God.

God and nature teach parents to nurture children in the religion of God.

Set and stated times there have been for God's worship from the beginning. The Sabbath.

From the fall of man God did teach their recovery by sacrifice.

Wicked ones, even the children of the devil, have made show of religion from the fall.

Hypocrites come without blood, even without sense of their own deserts and self-abasement, to serve God.

Sincere worshippers have been in the Church of God from the beginning.

THE SACRIFICES OF THE ANCIENT DISPENSATION.

Verse 4. I. That from the earliest times, the only way of acceptable worship has been by sacrifice. It is impossible to account for the origin and prevalence of sacrifice, but upon the principle of divine appointment. We cannot suppose that this offering of Abel, so highly

approved, was uncommanded. Analogy against it. In subsequent times God appointed the whole Jewish ritual. Tabernacle was erected after His pattern. It is not likely that God would leave fallen man without direction in this matter. There is no natural connection, to the eye of reason, between the sacrifice of a brute and the forgiveness of a sinner. Without shedding of blood is no remission.

II. The sacrifice which God accepts must be offered upon principles which God will approve. Abel gave of the firstlings. He offered his sacrifice in faith—in obedience to a divine institution—in dependence upon divine promise—in the exercise of devout affections. *A better sacrifice than Cain*—better as to the substance, better as to the feeling. Cain considered God as Creator, but Abel as Redeemer.

III. The order of divine procedure is to accept, first the person, and then the offering. The Lord had respect to Abel and his offering. Man first regards the gifts, and then the person according to the gifts, but God the contrary. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.

IV. The commencement of sacrifice with man's sin, and the consummation of sacrifice in a Saviour's death, plainly show that a system of atonement is incorporated with the whole train of Divine dispensation. 1. *How important to ascertain our interest in the great sacrifice.* 2. *That the church on earth has always presented a mixed company, and has always been in a militant state.* Cain worshipped in form, Abel in truth. The sheep and the goats, the wheat and the tares, will always be mingled till judgment. 3. *How singular is the fact that the first man who died, died a martyr.* 4. *Let us all learn to scrutinize our motives in religious worship, as we know that God strictly observes them.* He is not a Christian who is one outwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart.—(*The Evangelist.*)

Strange to say that the worship of God was the first occasion of difference amongst men.

God does not accept men according to the priority of their earthly birth.

Persons are accepted before duties can be.

No work of man can of itself find favour with God.

History of Cain as a Beacon.

Verse 5. **I. That he was the first-born of the family of man.** Who can describe the anxiety and wonder which his birth would produce? The birth of any child is both an interesting and momentous event; but the first, how especially so!

II. He was a worshipper of the true God. We know nothing of the history of his childhood. He recognised: 1. Proprietorship of God; 2. Bounty of God in His gifts; 3. His right to our homage. These were right. He was defective in faith.

III. He was distinguished for his industrious labour. Labour is honourable—healthy. It prevents temptations. Satan may tempt the industrious, but the idle tempt him. It is the real wealth of the commonwealth.

IV. He was the subject of the deadly passion of envy. God had respect to Abel, but not to Cain. His pride was wounded. Who can stand before envy. It sees no excellency in another. It corrodes the soul.

V. He was a murderer.

VI. He was an accursed vagabond.

VII. He was the subject of the Divine mercy and long-suffering.—(*Dr. Burns.*)

It is proper for hypocrites to be angry with God about his non-acceptance, but never with themselves for their ill performance.

The contrast between Cain and his brothers:—1. Cain lives and Abel dies. 2. Cain's race perishes; the race of Seth continues. 3. Cain the first natural born; Abel the first spiritual born.

The countenance an index to the moral sentiments of the heart.

Verse 6. God takes notice of the wrath of the wicked against His saints, and reproves it.

The anger of Cain was probably in part occasioned by the fear that the acceptance of his younger brother before God, might lead to some infringement of the rights of the firstborn. In the next verse he is assured that this should not be the case.

The relations and duties of social life are not altered by a person being admitted into the family of God.

Religion of Nature and the Religion of the Gospel.

Verse 7. Cain and Abel, like Sarah and Hagar, may be allegorized: the former was a fair representative of natural religionists, the father of Deism; the latter the representative of those who embrace revealed religion. Cain's religion, in common with many other false religions, had the following characteristics:—1. *It was a religion that had in it some good.* It acknowledged the existence of Divine Providence, and human obligations. There are no religions, however false, which do not contain some elements of good. The evils far preponderate. 2. *It was a religion of expediency.* It was assumed to keep up appearances. There was no principle underlying it. 3. *It was a religion which lacked faith.* It concerned itself about the present, but was utterly blind to the future. No faith, no reality. 4. *It was a religion abounding in self-righteousness.* It ignored the existence of sin. It ignored the existence of a breach between man and his Creator. 5. *It was a persecuting religion.* It could tolerate no other views but its own. It soon stained its hands with blood; an example followed in subsequent ages. The religion of God is forbearing, that of man vindictive. Abel's religion had also its characteristics:—1. *The religion of Abel embodied all the good that was in the other.* Whatever is of value in Deism is found in Christianity. 2. *It surpassed it even in its own excellencies.* There is no mention of Cain's being the best of the kind as of Abel's. Christianity reveals the truth of Deism with clearer light, and holds them with firmer grasp. 3. *It recognised the existence of guilt and its merited doom.* 4. *It was actuated by faith.* 5. *It was approved by God.*

I. **Natural Religion.** This consists in "doing well." Look at the principle on which it is founded. The principle is *practical goodness. This principle is intrinsically excellent.* Man was created to do well. *It is to be desired that all men should act upon this principle.* The world would be different if men were to. No need of police—prison. *It is a principle to which none can object.* Let us look at the *standard* by which it is to be tested. The standard is the moral law of creation. In order to do well, man must love God with all his heart, &c. There must be no omission. *The act must be perfect.* It must be a gem without a flaw. *The motive must be good. The rule must be good.* It must be done as God directs. Look at the *reward*, "Shalt thou not be accepted?" *Such a religion will command the approval of the Almighty. It will secure immortality for its votaries.* Had Adam continued to do well, he would have continued to live. This, then, is the religion of nature—is glorious. Have you performed its requirements? Think of sin—its *nature*—its *effects*—its ultimate *consequences*. How can we escape them? Ask natural religion. Will she suggest *repentance*? Will repentance replace things as they were—*Reformation*? This cannot alter the past. *An offering*—man has none to present—the *mercy of the Eternal*? God is merciful, but how can he show it to the sinner, in harmony with justice? Nature has no reply.

II. **Revealed Religion.** "A sin offering lieth at thy door." 1. *That revealed religion assumes that men are guilty.* If there is no sin, there can be no need of a sin-offering; and if there is a sin-offering, it is presumed that there is sin. Men have not done well. They are sinners. They are liable to *punishment*. 2. *That revealed religion has provided a sin-offering.* Three kinds of sacrifices were offered by the Jews—eucharistic—peace-offerings—atoning. The last the most prominent. Type of Calvary. *In the sin-offering there was a substitution of person—a substitution of sufferings—the acceptance of the sin-offering was accompanied with Divine evidence. This sacrifice is efficient.* 3. *That this sin-offering reposeth at the door.* The atonement of Christ is accessible to the sinner—it rests with man to avail himself of it—men neglect it—God exercises great long-suffering—sinners cannot go to hell without trampling on the sacrifice of the Cross—they will be deprived of exercise if they neglect it.—(*Homilist.*)

Doing well unto God is only effected by faith in the Divine Mediator.

Guilt and judgment come speedily upon the head of the evil-doer.

Outward rule God sometimes gives to wicked ones over His saints.

Verse 8. God's convictions and reproofs upon the wicked often occasion greater hardness, and rage in sin.

It is usual for wicked men to dissemble their rage toward God and His saints.

The simplicity of the saints often makes them a prey to the hypocrisy of the wicked.

Hypocritical enemies, though they be restrained for a time, opportunity reveals them.

Occasion, advantage, and privacy, make discovery of hypocrisy.

Nearest relatives escape not the violence of hypocrites.

The method of Satan is to draw men from envy to murder.

It is not merely from the influence of bad example, as many think, that vice and misery have so abounded in the world: before that could have effect, this crime presents us with as dreadful an instance of malignant passion as any age can afford; and as convincing a proof that it is from within—"out of the heart proceed evil thoughts and murders."

THREE EXPERIMENTS AND THREE FAILURES.

I. The Family idea won't keep men right. Cain and Abel were brothers.

II. Religious Ceremonial won't keep right. Cain and Abel both offered sacrifice.

III. Religious Persecution won't keep men right. Cain killed his brother, but a voice cried against him. What will keep men right? The love of God through Jesus Christ [*City Temple*].

THE FIRST MURDER.

I. It was the murder of one brother by another. We should have thought that the members of this small family could have lived on amicable terms with each other. We should never have dreamed of murder in their midst. See here:—1. *The power of envy.* 2. *The ambition of selfishness.* 3. *The quick development of passion.*

II. It was occasioned by envy in the religious department of life. The two brothers had each presented their sacrifice; only Abel's was accepted. This awakened the envy of Cain. Brothers ought to rejoice in the moral success of each other. Envy in the church is the great cause of strife. Men envy each other's talents. They murder each other's reputation. They kill many of tender spirit. You can slay your minister by a look—a word—as well as by a weapon. Such conduct is:—1. *Cruel.* 2. *Reprehensible.* 3. *Astonishing.* 4. *Frequent.*

III. That it was avenged by Heaven. 1. *By a convicting question.* 2. *By an alarming curse.* 3. *By a wandering life.*

He, who, according to his mother's hope was to have been the slayer of the serpent, becomes the murderer of his brother. It is well that parents are ignorant of the future of their children, or they would not entertain such bright hopes concerning them in infancy.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 9-16.

THE BITTER CURSE WHICH SIN BRINGS UPON AN INDIVIDUAL LIFE.

We have been thoroughly educated in the nature and effects of sin by the sacred narrative, not by philosophical instruction, but by the interesting events and transactions of daily life. We saw in the garden that sin consisted in a wandering thought from the word of God, and also in disobedience to the divine command; now we behold it in full development, as a dire passion, and as a social wrong. Sin is a progress in the history of peoples. In different men it manifests itself in different forms. One man sins by disobedience; another man by murder. When once it makes an entrance into a family none can tell how it will affect them, or predict where it will end. But these narratives in Genesis solemnly and emphatically teach that sin makes men wretched, that it is a loss rather than a gain, that it is a delusion, and that it is followed by a life-long curse. Surely such a revelation concerning sin ought to deter men from it. But the curse it will bring in the next life it is impossible for human pen to write. Look at the curse it involves in this life.

I. That it renders a man subject to the solemn and convincing enquiries of God. "And the Lord said unto Cain, where is Abel thy brother?" All men are liable to the solemn interrogations of God, even when their lives are pure and good, but especially when they have involved themselves in guilt. Thus Adam was questioned after his disobedience. The good welcome these divine questionings as moments of glad communion with the Infinite; the guilty tremble before them as the herald of yet more terrible doom. The questions of God touch the inner vitalities of our moral life and conduct. None can evade them, though many try. They demand an immediate reply.

In the case of Cain:—1. *This enquiry was solemn.* God did not ask Cain about his tillage of the ground, or about the fruits of his manual toil. He does not ordinarily question men on such topics. These are the subject of human interrogations rather than divine. God questions men about their moral feelings, about their conduct. He is cognizant of every sin we commit, and may at any time inquire of us its meaning and intention. It is well for the moral safety of society that wicked men are arraigned before authoritative tribunals, or human passion would depopulate the world. It is certainly a most solemn experience for a human soul to be interrogated by God about its sins. 2. *This enquiry was convincing.* It implies that although the question was asked, that God knew all about the murder which the passionate brother had committed. God does not interrogate human souls to obtain information respecting their sins, as though he were ignorant of them. His inquiries are intended to produce deep conviction of mind, to awaken men to a proper sense of guilty shame, and sometimes to lead them to Himself, that they may be forgiven. A question from God, like the look from Christ, has broken many souls into refreshing tears. It is well for a man to confess his sins to Heaven. This is the best way to get rid of them. 3. *This enquiry was retributive.* It was not merely intended to awaken Cain to a consciousness of his late deed, but also to vindicate the memory of Abel. God does not allow his saints to be slaughtered at the caprice and passion of man, without a retributive interview with the murderer. When nations have slain the good, then it is that God has held terrible controversy with them. It is not always the law of heaven to prevent or turn aside the stroke of anger, but it is always the law of heaven to avenge it. It is foolish as well as criminal of the world to slay its best worshippers; to put out its brightest lights. Cain deeply felt the retribution of this inquiry. 4. *This enquiry was unexpected.* Cain felt the passion of envy. He slew his brother. He probably expected that that would be the end of it, or, it may be that he did not calculate as to the consequence of his deed. However, no sooner was the wicked murder perpetrated, than God appeared to avenge it. The dream of sin is soon dispelled by the dawning light of the Divine presence. Sinners are always exposed to the intrusions of heaven. They cannot hide themselves from God. They must listen to His voice. They feel a condemnation they cannot remove.

II. That it sends a man on through life with the most terrible memories of wrong doing within his soul. 1. *Cain would never forget the hour in which he slew his brother.* The circumstances of the deed would ever remain new and vivid in his remembrance. The whole picture would *live* within him. He would be the constant spectator of it. None could blot it out, none could hide it, and none could give him relief from its awful torment. Such mental pictures are the anguish of a wicked life. What more terrible curse could come upon a man than this. Then this deed would be aggravated to himself by the thought that *he had slain his brother.* No long standing enemy had fallen victim to his rage, no foreigner, but the son of his own mother. Surely this was an aggravation of his crime. It would also be aggravated to himself by the thought that his envy toward his brother, had been occasioned *by the superiority of his brother's service to God.* The purity of his brother's character and the fidelity of his offering would rise to the vision of his remorseful soul. He would feel that he had slain the innocent. But the deed was done. He could not alter it. It must remain the dread companion of his life. This is one of the greatest sources of punishment to the sinner. (1). *It is rendered so by the memory of man.* There is no forgetfulness to man. Though the days pass, he carries their moral history in his soul for ever. (2). *It is rendered so by the conscience of man.* The mere remembrance of a deed would be but little torment to a man, if his conscience did not refer him to its moral wrong. Conscience always points the murderer to his innocent victim. (3). *It is rendered so by the will of God.* God has so ordered the faculties of man that they shall inflict punishment upon the wrong-doer. Truly then Cain is introducing an element of sadness into his life by this crime, the poignancy of which he is little aware. By one sinful act men may make themselves wretched for ever.

III. That it often ruins the temporal prosperity of a man.—"And now art thou cursed from the earth which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength." Thus the temporal prospects of the murderer were to be ruined. Sin often destroys the trades and professions of men:—1. *It destroys their reputation.* In business, reputation is worth as much to a man as capital. If he is once detected in wrong doing or dishonesty of any kind, his trade will decline. Goodness is an enriching policy. 2. *It wastes their earnings.* There are multitudes of men who would be rich if they were only morally good and steady. What they earn by industry, they spend in revelling at night. They are drunken. They are improvident. They are reckless. Trade cannot long survive this. 3. *It enfeebles their agencies.* The ground was not to yield Cain its wonted produce. By sin men weaken their bodies, their minds, their souls, and all their instrumentalities of trade. Thus their temporal prospects are ruined thereby.

IV. That it commits a man to a wandering and a restless life.—"A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth." 1. *Sin makes men restless.* It awakens within them restless impulses, ever changing moods, and strange fancies. They are as the great billows sweeping on from one rock to another in their ceaseless flow. Piety alone can render manhood stable and strong. But of this the wicked are destitute. Hence they are unpeaceful. Sin makes men restless:—(1). *Because they have in a very brief term to seek new employments.* Wicked men cannot remain long in the employment of one master, they are soon detected. Their past character follows them. (2). *Because they have soon to find new friends.* The friendships of wicked men are not enduring. They are transient. They soon terminate in feud. And residence is very much determined by friendship, and the social feeling that is known to prevail amongst a people. (3). *Because he has to avoid old rumours.* Whenever the fugitive is conscious that the story of his past life and conduct has followed him, another change of locality becomes necessary. Hence wicked men are the world's fugitives.

V. That it crushes man with a heavy burden and almost renders him despairing.—"And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear." The sinner is deeply conscious of his punishment, knows that it is equitable, and has no power whatever to resist it. Sin is a burden oppressive to the soul. It marks men so that the world knows and avoids them. It sends them into solitude. It fills them with despair. Their misery few can pity. The murderer should dwell alone. LESSONS:—1. *That sin is the greatest curse of human life.* 2. *That God is the avenger of the good.* 3. *That the sinner is the greatest sufferer in the end.* 4. *That good men go from their worship into heaven*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

THE TWO BROTHERS; OR, EARTHLY RELATIONSHIP THE MEDIUM OF SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE.

"Am I my brother's keeper?"—ver. 9.

"And he brought him to Jesus."—John i. 42.

Verse 9. Of the first two brothers who lived on this earth, the one hated and slew the other; and when arraigned before God and his own conscience, denied the obligation of fraternal care. Of the first two brothers mentioned in the New Testament, the one, having found the Messiah, hastened to fetch the other. These brothers are representative men. *Cain* is the embodiment of the spirit of hatred—selfishness—the world. *Andrew* of the spirit of love—self-sacrificing zeal—of Christ.

I. That earthly relationships involve the duty of spiritual care. Relation, taken in its widest sense, if not the ground of all moral obligation, is certainly intimately connected therewith. No man can be a parent, a son, or a master, without being specially bound to care for his own. Men have to provide for their households in earthly things, and ought to in spiritual. In proportion to the closeness of the relationship is the force of the obligation.

II. That earthly relationships afford peculiar opportunities for the discharge of this duty. God has constituted the varied relationships of life for purpose of promoting the moral good of man. Opportunity and power should be voluntarily used. Families have little thought of the opportunity they have of bringing each other to Jesus.

III. That according as the Spirit of Christ or of selfishness is possessed, will this duty be fulfilled or neglected. Sin, whose essence is selfishness, is a severing principle. But Christ's Spirit is a spirit of love. We must come to Christ ourselves to get the incentive to this duty.

IV. That concerning the performance of this duty an account will be required. And the Lord said unto Cain, &c. Vain will be excuse. God will speak. So will conscience.

V. That earthly relationships, according to the manner in which they are used, become an eternal blessing or bane.—(*Homilist.*)

Hypocritical persecutors think to bury the saints and all their persecutions out of sight.

Jehovah will have an account of His saints, though He leave them to be killed by such cruel ones.

Hypocrisy and infidelity make men as impudent in denying sin as bold in committing it.

Hypocrisy makes sinners deal proudly with God.

Verse 10. When Cain thought that he had won, that he was now alone the beloved child, that Abel was wholly forgotten, then did the latter still live, stronger and mightier than before. Then does the Majesty on High assume His cause; He cannot bear it. He cannot keep silence when His own are oppressed. And though they are crushed for a little while, they only rise to a more glorious and stronger state; for they still live [*Cramer*].

It is not for slaughtered sheep and cattle slain that God asks; it is for a slain man that He inquires. It follows that men have the hope of a resurrection, the hope in a God who out of the bodily dearth can bear them up to everlasting life, and who asks after their blood as a very dear and precious thing. (*Ps.* cxvi. 15). What can be that still small voice which comes up from the earth, and which God hears high up in heaven? Abel had, hitherto, whilst yet in life, endured violence with gentleness and silence how is it that now when he is dead, and rudely buried in the earth, he is impatient at the wrong? How is it that he who before spake not one word against his brother, now cries out so complainingly, and, by his cry, moves God to action? Oppression and silence are no hindrance to God in judging the cause which the world so mistakenly fancies to be buried [*Luther*].

When man is in covenant with God nothing can overcome him; he has Omnipotence on his side. Jehovah is the God of His dead saints.

Verses 11—12. God followeth sin close to the heel with vengeance.

The person of the sinner must bear the punishment of his sin.

The earth will not be quiet till murderers receive their doom.

The place of sin God sometimes makes the place of vengeance.

Adam had already become a stranger in the earth; Cain is now a fugitive [*Calvin.*]

Verses 13—16. God's sentence upon sinners makes them sensible, however senseless before.

Terrors come invincibly upon hypocritical persecutors of the Church.

Man's habitation can give him no shelter when it is cursed by God.

Jehovah is the Sovereign Dispenser of the life and death of His enemies; it hangs upon His word.

Jehovah may exempt persecutors from the stroke of man, but not from His own wrath.

Mysterious is the providence of God in continuing and taking away the lives of His saints and enemies. That Abel should die and Cain live, and yet Cain be cursed of God and Abel blessed.

God's threatenings of wrath end in execution of the same.

Banishment from God's favour, temporal and eternal, is the doom of impenitent persecutors.

In all this it is evidently implied that the law according to which the murderer is to be slain by his fellows, is the original law of conscience and of nature. Cain, when his conscience is in part awakened by the dreadful denunciation of Divine wrath (verse 11), has enough of feeling to convince him that his fellow-men will consider themselves entitled if not bound to slay him. And he does not—he dares not quarrel with the justice of such a proceeding. God, on the other hand, clearly intimates that but for an express prohibition, the murderer's fear would infallibly and justly have been realized [*Dr. Candlish*].

When God is against a man the whole world is against him.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 16—18.

THE FUTURE OF A GOD-FORSAKEN LIFE.

I. That a God-forsaken man is not cut off from the mitigating influences of domestic life. 1. *Here the future of the cursed life has some relief.* Cain had his wife to share his sorrow, and, for all we know, to help him in it. The domestic relationship is a great relief and comfort to a sad life. When all goes wrong without, it can find a refuge at home. 2. *The children of a cursed life are placed at a moral disadvantage.* They are the offspring of a God-forsaken parent. It is awful to commence life under these conditions. It is dangerous for their future. We should pity and strive to aid the little ones who are brought up in godless homes. They start in the world at a great peril. Thus Cain had the comfort of domestic life. One ray of mercy gleams even through the dark history of a God-forsaken man.

II. That a God-forsaken man is likely very soon to seek satisfaction in earthly employments and things. Cain built a city. This would find occupation for his energies. It would tend to divest his mind of his wicked past. It would enrich his poverty. It might become the home of his posterity. Here he could dwell in safety, and without annoyance. Society would be much benefitted if many men of kindred spirit to Cain would to-day bid it farewell, to erect their own city in the present solitudes of nature. We could spare them without serious loss. They would be better in a city alone. The contagion of their wicked life would then be stayed. It was no easy task for Cain to build a city. But when men are going to enrich themselves they think not of ease. They would rather build a *city* for themselves, than even a *church* for

God. Many men are energetic in worldly enterprise, who have altogether fallen away from God.

III. That often a God-forsaken man is disposed to try to build a rival to the Church from whence he has been driven. If he has been driven from God, he will engage his energies to build a city for Satan. In this work some wicked men are active. And to-day the city of evil is of vast dimensions, is thickly populated, but is weak in its foundation, and will ultimately be swept away by the prayerful effort of the Church, and the wrath of God.

IV. That men whose names are not written in heaven are very anxious to make them famous on earth. They build cities rather than characters. They hope thus to awe the world by their exploit. To gain the admiration of men by their enterprise. A man who establishes a city is useful to society. But the man who does it may be a fugitive murderer. Whereas a man who builds up a good, noble life is doing a grand social work, and will be God-remembered. LESSONS: 1. *Earth cannot give the soul a true substitute for God.* 2. *Famil relationship is unsanctified without Him.* 3. *Cities are useless without Him.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 16—18. The geographical situation of the land of *Nod*, in the front of Eden, where Cain settled after his departure from the place or the land of the revealed presence of God, cannot be determined. The name *Nod* denotes a land of flight and banishment, in contrast with Eden, the land of delight, where Jehovah walked with men. There Cain knew his wife. The text assumes it as self-evident that she accompanied him in his exile; also, that she was a daughter of Adam, and consequently a sister of Cain. The marriage of brothers and sisters was inevitable in the case of the children of the first men, if the human race was actually to descend from a single pair, and may therefore be justified in the face of the Mosaic prohibition of such marriages, on the ground that the sons and daughters of Adam represented not merely the family but the genus, and that it was not till after the rise of several families that the bands of fraternal and conjugal love became distinct from one another, and assumed fixed and mutually exclusive forms, the violation of which is sin. [*Keil and Delitzsch.*]

By building a city we cannot fail to detect Cain's desire to neutralize the curse of banishment, and create for his family a point of unity, as a compensation for the loss of unity in fellowship with God, as well as the inclination of the family of Cain for that which was earthly. [*Delitzsch.*]

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 19—26.

Genesis iv. 23, 24. "And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech; for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt; if Cain shall be avenged seven-fold, truly Lamech seventy and seven-fold." The longevity of the antediluvian patriarchs serves to keep pure tradition, the only way in which religious truth was then transmitted. It also caused character to be very fully developed—the righteous and the wicked—this instance.

I. The case of Lamech shews the effect of an abandonment of the Church's fellowship. 1st. The end and use of ordinances. 2nd. These are enjoyed only in the Church. 3rd. Cain and his posterity forsook the fellowship of the Church, and lost its privileges. 4th. Mark the effect of this in Lamech. 1. In his government of himself, unrestrained by Divine precepts, a polygamist. 2. In household government, a tyrant. 3. In his character as a member of society, a murderer. One sin leads to another.

I The case of Lamech shews that outward prosperity is no sure mark of God's favour. We have seen Lamech's character 2nd. He was remarkable for family prosperity (verses 20—22). 3rd. God's dealings with His people have all a reference to their spiritual and eternal good. 4th. Hence they have not uninterrupted prosperity. 5th. To the ungodly, temporal good is cursed, and becomes a curse—increased responsibility, increased guilt. 6th. Splendid masked misery—embroidered shroud—sculptured tomb. 7th. The graces of poetry given here—speech of Lamech.

III The case of Lamech shews that the dealings of God are misunderstood and misinterpreted by the ungodly. 1st. God protected Cain by a special Providence, that his sentence might take effect. 2nd. Lamech argues from this, that he is under a similar special Providence. 3rd. Common—they who despise Divine things still know as much of them as is convenient for their reasonings. Doctrines—depravity, election, justification by faith Incidents—Noah, David, Peter, malefactor on the cross—"All things work" &c. "Because sentence against," &c. Eccles. viii. 11. 4th. Satan thus uses something like the sword of the Spirit—infuses poison into the Word of Life. 5th. The Scriptures are thus by men made to injure them fatally. They wrest them to their own destruction—food in a weak stomach—a weed in a rich soil. (1.) See the effects of a departure from God. (2.) Avoid the first step.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 19—22. Wives and offspring may be given to the most wicked in great number.

All arts and endowments, liberal and mechanical, may be vouchsafed to ungodly men.

Wicked men may be renowned for external inventions.

All such endowments leave men without grace and without God.

God's curse works through such providential privileges to the wicked.

In the sixth generation from Cain, his descendants are noticed as introducing great improvements and refinements into the system of society. Not only farming and manufactures, but music and poetry flourished among them. In farming, Jabal gave a new form to the occupations of the shepherd and the herdsman; "he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle" (verse 20). In manufactures, Tubal Cain promoted the use of scientific tools, being the "instructor of every artificer in brass and iron" (verse 22). Jubal, again, excelled in the science of melody, standing at the head of the profession of "all such as handle the harp and organ" (verse 21). And Lamech himself, in his address to his two wives, gives the first specimen on record of primæval poetry, or the art of versification in measured couplets, or parallel lines redoubling and repeating the sense (verses 23, 24).

"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice!
Ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech:
For I have slain a man to my wounding,
And a young man to my hurt.
If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,
Truly Lamech, seventy-and-sevenfold."
[*Dr. Candelish.*]

Thus in the apostate race, driven to the use of their utmost natural ingenuity. and full of secular ambition, the pomp of cities, and the manifold inventions of a flourishing community, arose and prospered. They increased in power, in wealth, and in luxury. In almost all earthly advantages, they attained to a superiority over the more simple and rural family of Seth. And they afford an instance of the high cultivation which a people may often possess who are altogether irreligious and ungodly, as well as of the progress which they may make in the arts and embellishments of life, [*Dr. Candelish*].

Verses 23, 24. Polygamy from the first has brought intestine vexations into families.

A lustful spirit will be tyrannical also.

God's forbearance of some wicked ones makes others impudent to sin.

Lust will make men pervert the righteous word of God to their destruction.

Verses 25, 26. The character of the ungodly family of Cainites was now fully developed in Lamech and his children. The history, therefore, turns from them to indicate the progress of the godly race. After Abel's death a third son was born to Adam, to whom his mother gave the name of Seth, the appointed one, the compensation.

We have here an account of the commencement of that worship of God which consists in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, or in the acknowledgment and celebration of the mercy and help of Jehovah. While the family of Cainites, by the erection of a city, and the invention and development of worldly arts and business, were laying the foundation for the kingdom of this world; the family of the Sethites began, by united invocation of the name of the God of grace, to found and to erect the Kingdom of God [*Keil and Delitzsch*].

There is a time to break off sad lament for departed saints.

Men's names are sometimes as prophecies and doctrines to God's church.

God has set His church to grow and none can hinder it.

God has stated times of renewing His worship where it has declined.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IV.

BY THE

REV. WM. ADAMSON.

Difficulty! Ver. 1. This was an hour of great difficulty—of intense anxiety—of appalling perplexity to Adam. Was he to be left alone—burdened with a weight of woe—abandoned to his own blind guidance—allowed to wander anywhere amid the Dædalian mazes of ignorance and folly? No; God would help him, if he would but take hold of His Divine Hand. "Papa! It is dark! Take my hand!" I reached out my hand, and took her tiny one in my own, clasping it firmly. A sigh of relief came up from her little heart. All her loneliness and fear were gone, and in a few moments she was sound sleep again. It was the voice of my little daughter sleeping in the crib beside my bed—at the very moment that I was awake amid the darkness of Providence. I lay awake thinking, until my brain grew wild with uncertainty. Again and again I took up and considered the difficulties of my situation—looking to the right and the left for ways of extrication; but all was dark. Presently my little girl's timid voice broke faintly on my ears; and I, too—in an almost wild outburst of feeling—cried: "Father in Heaven, it is dark; take, oh! take my hand." Then a great peace fell on me. The terror of darkness was gone. So with Adam; perplexed at first, he learned to take the proffered hand of God:—

"Child! take My hand,
Cling *close* to Me: I'll lead thee through the land;
Trust My all-seeing care; so shalt thou stand
'Midst glory bright above."

Employment! Ver. 2. Lord Tenterden was proud to point out to his son the shop in which his father had shaved persons for a penny. But men, as Beecher comments, seem ashamed of labour. They aim to lead a life of emasculated idleness and laziness. Like the polyps that float useless and nasty upon the sea—all jelly and flabby, no muscle or bone; it opens and shuts—shuts and opens—sucks in and squirts out—such are these poor fools. Their parents toiled and grew strong—built up their forms of iron and bone; but they themselves are boneless, without sinew of mind or muscle of heart.

"Better to sink beneath the shock,
Than moulder piecemeal on the rock."
—*Byron.*

Types! Ver. 3. Reflected light has the marvellous power of painting the object from which it is thrown; hence our photographic likenesses. Thus the light of the Lord Jesus, radiating on our souls from the mirror of the Word, fixes His image there. The photographic discovery is a modern one, but God the Spirit has been painting the likeness of Christ upon souls from the beginning. They are one

"With Him, and in their souls His image bear,
Rejoicing in the likeness." —*Upham.*

Fire! Ver. 4. Fire was a symbol of the Divine Presence; and in the literature and customs of the East the same thing is asserted. In the ancient writings, where the marriages of the gods and demi-gods are described, it is always said the ceremony was performed in the presence of the God of Fire. In respectable marriages in India, fire is an important element in their celebration. It is made, says Roberts, of the wood of the mango-tree; and is kindled in the centre of the room, while round it walk the bride and bridegroom amid the Brahmin incantations. Is this a perversion of the primæval truth that God's appearance by fire was His witness to the mystical union between Abel's soul and His Son Jesus Christ!

"The smoke of sacrifice arose, and God
Smell'd a sweet savour of obedient faith."

Atonement! Ver. 4. The startling word "blood" would be the last a man would select for a symbol of peace and purity. While blood would render whatever it touches impure, it is the only thing that takes away the stain of sin. Nearly every heathen nation has had this "moral intuition" of the necessity of atoning blood. It remained for Christianity to have an excrescence such as that of the Unitarians, who declaim against "a religion of blood, and atonement of blood." And yet is not the blood of atonement the leading idea in the Bible? It is like the scarlet thread which runs through all the naval cloth—cut it where you please, that vein of crimson is visible. The word "atonement" is constantly used to signify the reconciliation to God by bloody sacrifices. The priest made atonement by sacrifice—first for his own sins, and then for the sins of all the people.

"With blood—but not his own—the awful sign
At once of sin's desert and guilt's remission,
The Jew besought the clemency divine,
The hope of mercy blending with contrition.—*Conder.*

Disappointment! Ver. 5. The offering of Cain was like a beautiful present, but there was no sorrow for sin in it—no asking for pardon—and so God would not receive it. "Mother won't take my book," once sobbed out a little boy—holding in his hand a very beautiful little volume prettily bound, with gilt edges to the leaves. It was a pretty present, purchased with the pocket-money which he had been for weeks saving for his mother's birthday; and now she would not have it. But she did take the needle-book and purse which her little daughter presented to her. Why did she refuse the beautiful gift of her boy? He had been naughty—selfish, passionate, false—and had not at all repented; and so when he brought his offering, she put it gently on one side, saying, "No, Charlie." He turned away sullenly, muttering that he did not care, and beginning to cherish feelings of a bad kind towards his sister. But after a while he came to himself—stole into the room, flung himself on her shoulder, confessed his fault with tears, and found favour with his mother. By-and-by, she tenderly whispered, "You may bring your present." So God acted with Cain, but he would persist in obduracy of heart, of which one might say :—

"You may as well do anything most hard,
As seek to soften that (than which what's harder?)"—*Shakespeare.*

Blood! Ver. 7. In nearly every country, men have felt that bloodshedding was an essential element of religious belief. A Thug at Meerut, who had been guilty of many murders, was arrested and placed in prison. Whilst there, a missionary visited him—brought him to embrace the Gospel, and to consent to confess his crimes. On his trial, he accordingly avowed the sins of his dreadful life—and after recounting murder after murder, he declared that he had committed them in the full belief that, by the shedding of the blood of each victim, he would not only please the dreadful goddess Kali, but also procure her favour for the life to come. He then took out a Bible from his linen vest, and said: "Had I but received this book sooner, I should not have done it, for I find that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin."

"Lord, I believe Thy precious blood,
Which at the mercy-seat of God
Forever doth for sinners plead,
For me—e'en for *my* soul—was shed."
—*Wesley.*

Murder! Ver. 7. "Blood will out" is the blunt phrase of an old proverb or saw. Did Cain hide the body? Yet no matter, whether the lifeless corpse lay with its face open to the noonday sun, or buried in the leafy recesses of some thickset grove, or shrouded in the gloomy damps of some subterranean cavern: God could see it. He could hear the call of Justice. How strangely deeds of blood are disclosed! Two French merchants, relates Clarke, were travelling to a fair, and, while passing through a wood, one of them murdered the other, and robbed him of his money. After burying him to prevent discovery, he proceeded on his journey; but the murdered man's dog remained behind. His howling attracted passers-by, who were led to search the spot. The fair being ended, they watched the return of the merchants; and the murderer no sooner made his appearance than the dog sprung furiously upon him. "Be sure your sin will find you out." How terribly was this exemplified in the case of Eugene Aram, whose very conscience at last unfolded the tale :—

He told how murderers walk the earth
Beneath the curse of Cain,
With crimson clouds before their eyes,
And flames about their brain."—*Hood.*

Conscience! Ver. 8. Away in the wilds of New Zealand, a noble champion of the Cross, once overheard a native voice from amid a tangled maze of brushwood praying that God would make sin as sensitive to his soul as a speck of dust is to the apple of the eye. Keep your conscience tender, tender as the eye that closes its lids against an atom of dust; or as that sensitive plant which shrinks when its leaves are touched, ay, even when the breath of the mouth falls on it. Had Cain but heeded this! Had he only taken notice of the first speck of dust that fell, of the first prick of the pin that reached, of the first breath of sin that rested on his conscience, all might have been well. There is a species of poplar, whose leaves are rustled by a breeze too faint to stir the foilage of other trees; and such should have been the conscience of Cain, easily moved by the "little sins" of envy and dislike. There would then have been no cry of brother's blood, no need for him to wander forth—

"Like a deer in the fright of the chase,
With a fire in his heart, and a brand on his face."

Retribution! Ver. 8. The deed is done, and blood stains the hand of Cain, a brother's blood. The ocean, with all its fierce and furious waves, cannot wash out the scarlet dye. Agonies of remorse cannot recall it. And yet these probably were not slight. Some have supposed that he showed no compunction for the cruel crime, and that his heart was ice. But if it was ice, it was that of the Arctic, beneath whose thick crust throb the waves, and move the reptiles of the deep. Far down within his breast, the waters of remorse were surging and muddy; and—

"From that day forth no place to him could be
So lonely, but that thence might come a pang
Brought from without to inward misery."—
Wordsworth.

Conviction! Ver. 9. When Richard the Lion was on his return from the Holy Land, he was taken captive by his enemy the Archduke of Austria, and thrown into an unknown dungeon. His favorite minstrel went in search of him, having only the clue that his master was imprisoned in a castle in some mountain-forest. At last his music found out the prison, for one day when Blondel was playing his favorite air beneath the castle wall, Richard recognized the music and voice. When Adam was captive in Satan's dungeon, God's Divine voice called him forth to penitence in vain. Now the same voice of Divine music seeks to awaken echoes in the heart of Cain, to arouse him to contrition by the consciousness of conviction. But all in vain! No; the hardened heart breaks not. The sullen lips pour forth no cry for pardon. No contrition asks for mercy. Rather does his answer imply reproach, as when Adam said: The woman whom THOU gavest me—

"The unclean spirit
That from my childhood up, hath tortured me,
Hath been too cunning and too strong for me.
Am I to blame for this?"

Remorse! Ver. 9. Tiberius felt the remorse of conscience so violent, that he protested to the senate that he suffered death daily; and Trapp tells us of Richard III that, after the murder of his two innocent nephews, he had fearful dreams and visions, would leap out of his bed, and, catching his sword, would go distractedly about the chamber, everywhere seeking to find out the cause of his own-occasioned disquiet. If, therefore, men more or less familiarized with crime and deeds of blood, had the fangs of the serpent ever probing their breasts, is it unreasonable to conclude that Cain knew seasons of sad regrets? If he had not, God's enquiry soon stirred up the pangs! The cruel Montassar, having assassinated his father, was one day admiring a beautiful painting of a man on horseback, with a diadem encircling his head, and a Persian inscription. Enquiring the significance of the words, he was told that they were: "I am Shiunjeh, the son of Kosru, who murdered my father, and possessed the crown only six months." Montassar turned pale, horrors of remorse at once seized on him, frightful dreams interrupted his slumbers until he died. And no sooner did God address the first fratricide, than conscience roused herself to inflict poignant pains:—

"O the wrath of the Lord is a terrible thing!
Like the tempest that withers the blossoms of spring,
Like the thunder that bursts on the summer's domain,
It fell on the head of the homicide Cain."

Guilt! (Ver. 12.) Pilkington very excellently likens the pangs of conscious guilt to the groundswell after a storm, which mariners tell us appears long after the storm has ceased, and far off from its locality. They come up in awful vividness; as when a flash of lightning reveals *but for a moment* the dangers of a shipwrecked crew. They have long been covered up, but only covered like the carvings of some old minster, or like that invisible ink which needs but the fire to bring out legibly the handwriting on the wall of conscience. For a moment are the stings of some; but not so Cain's—there they remained, acute and anguished; and of him we may say *figuratively:*—

"As he plodded on, with sullen clang
A sound of chains aloud the desert rang."

Martyrs! (Ver. 12.) "How early," says Bishop Hall, "did martyrdom come into the world!" The first man that died—died for religion; and the greatest lesson, as Green remarks in this chapter, is that the first man saved went to heaven just as all of us must do—if we are to be saved at all. It must have been a strange, yet happy day for the angels of God when His spirit came among them from this far-off world. He had sinned—they had never fallen. He had laboured and sorrowed—they had never shed a tear for themselves. He had died—they knew not what death was. But now his soul is among them—singing, not their song, but a new one—one all his own. As he sings, how every seraphic harp is silent, and every seraphic heart is still to hear

"The song that ne'er was sung before
A sinner reached the heavenly shore;
And now does sound for evermore."

Disclosure! (Ver. 9.) How long it was before God met him, we are not told — some suppose that it was on his way back from the deed of blood. Others think that probably days and weeks elapsed—that the parents, like Jacob, had come to believe Abel dead at the hands of the wild beasts, and that possibly Cain was all the more fondly cherished. If so, was Cain's conscience at ease? Or, did he have his hours of moodiness, when his wondering parents heard him start and mutter:—

"Too late! Too late! I shall not see him more
Among the living! That sweet, patient face
Will never more rebuke me?"

Very recently, a murderer buried his victim in the warehouse attached to his business premises. For months, the disconsolate parents sought their daughter far and near—besought her paramour to disclose the secret of her absence; but in vain. For twelve long weary months no trace of the missing one could be discovered; and then a trivial act of carelessness revealed the mystery of death. Yet, he had been heard to wish at times that he had never been born, or was dead:—

> "It were a mercy
> That I were dead, or never had been born."—
> *Longfellow.*

Condemnation! Ver. 13. Very little idea can be formed of the sufferings of Cain, when we read that God visited him with life-long remorse. John Randolph, in his last illness, said to his doctor: "Remorse! Remorse! Remorse! Let me see the word! show it to me in a dictionary." There being none at hand, he asked the surgeon to write it out for him, then having looked at it carefully, he exclaimed: "Remorse! you do not know *what it means.*" Happy are those who never know. It gives, as Thomas says, a terrible form and a horrible voice to everything beautiful and musical without. It is recorded of Bessus—a native of Polonia in Greece—that the notes of birds were so insufferable to him, as they never ceased chirping the murder of his father—that he would tear down their nests and destroy both young and old. The music of the sweet songsters of the grove were as the shrieks of hell to a guilty conscience. And how terribly would the familiar things of life become to Cain a source of agony!

> "The kiss of his children shall scorch him like flame,
> When he thinks of the curse that hangs over his name,
> And the wife of his bosom—the faithful and fair,
> Can mix no sweet drop in his cup of despair:
> For her tender caress, and her innocent breath,
> But still in his soul the hot embers of death"—
> *Knox.*

Godless Prosperity! (Verse 20.) How pitifully foolish, exclaims Law, are the votaries of the world! They may have gifts, which glitter splendidly; but it is only for a speck of time. Their brightest sun soon sets in darkest night. Their joys are no true joys, while they remain; but their continuance is a fleeting dream. Their flowers have many a thorn, and in the plucking fade. Their fruitless blossoms soon decay. Their eyes stand out with fatness, they have often more than heart could wish; and yet all this has its end—like the pampered sacrificial victim described in Prescot's History of Mexico. For twelve months, the intended sacrifice was allowed to revel in every luxury—to indulge in every pleasure; only to be laid on the altar and have his palpitating heart torn from his breast. "What shall I come to, father," exclaimed a young man, "if I go on prospering in this way?"—to which enquiry the parent tersely and tritely responded: "The grave." The tinsel glare, says Secker, is too apt to offend the weak eyes of a saint. Alas! why should we envy him a little light, who is to be shrouded in everlasting darkness? For

> "When Fortune, thus has tossed her child in air,
> Snatched from the covert of an humble state,
> How often have I seen him dropped at once!
> Our morning's envy! and our evening's sigh!"
> —*Young.*

First Step! Evil once introduced spreads as a flame amongst dry stubble. The weed—once rooted—can hardly be eradicated; and, like that great aquatic plant introduced from America, will spread on all sides. Mortify the first sin; for by yielding to it you may found a pyramid of misery. One fault indulged in soon swells into a deepening torrent, and widens into a boundless sea. One little leak may sink the boldest ship. It is said of Tiberius that, whilst Augustus ruled, he was no way tainted in his reputation; but that, when once he gave way to sin, there was no crime to which he was not accessory. When Lamech was yet a youth, he probably displayed no disposition to great crimes; but no sooner had he married two wives in violation of the Divine command than he gradually loosened all moral restrictions and gave full vent to his passions—culminating in homicide. Avoid the first step!

> "One mischief entered brings another in;
> The second pulls a third the third draws more,
> And they for all the rest, set ope the door."—
> *Smith.*

Church! (Ver. 26.) The little seed which prophecy planted in Eden grows age by age more vast than that tree which the prophet beheld in vision, whose height reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth. "There are lofty heights in nature," says Bate, which catch the morning sun before it has risen in the valleys, and which stand up glowing in the golden light when the shades of evening have wrapped these in deepening dusk. And so there are countries in which the Church has shed her light far and wide, while others remain in gloom of heathen ignorance. But as the sun before it has completed its circuit lights up every vale and hill, so the Church shall grow to her full dimensions in spite of all hindrances. It has entwined its roots through all the shadowy institutions of the elder dispensation, and standing tall and erect in the midst of the new, it defies—to use the sentiment of Wiseman—the whirlwind and the lightning, the draught and scorching sun. Like the prophet's vine—it will spread its branches to the uttermost parts of the earth, to feed them with the sweetest fruits of holiness.

> "Long as the world itself shall last,
> The sacred Banyan still shall spread,
> From clime to clime—from age to age,
> Its sheltering shadow shall be shed."

CHAPTER V.

Critical Notes.—Notwithstanding the measure of difficulty standing in the way of ascertaining the meaning of the proper names of Scripture, the subject cannot be wisely neglected: what we do know is every now and then most striking and suggestive; and what we do not know, and with existing appliances cannot learn, occasionally possesses an interest almost amounting to fascination. We know enough to feel intensely curious to know more. In fact, these old names have the charm of fossils—they were once living, and had a place in a living sphere of human hopes and fears, and passions and disappointments; and by them we seem every now and then to get a glimpse into a now buried world. These glimpses come like snatches of reality, and may be of considerable indirect service, even where we most feel that positive knowledge eludes our grasp. In the following summary of the meanings (certain or probable) of the proper names of this chapter, the reader will understand the appended initials to signify as follows:—G, Gesenius; F, Fürst; D, Davies; M, Murphy. Where the meaning has had to be gleaned inferentially from the author, it is enclosed in parenthetical marks "( )": where the author expressly intimates a doubt as to the signification of a name, it is followed by the sign of interrogation "?"

1. **Adam**] "Red" ? G.; "made of dust or earth," F.; "ruddy" ? but prob. "earth born," D.; "red" (from red soil), M.—3. **Seth**] "Placing," "setting," G.; "compensation," F.; prob. "substitute," D.; "placed," "put," M.—6. **Enos**] "Mortal, decaying man," F.; "man," D.; "man," "sickly," M.—9. **Cainan**] "Possession" ? G.; "a child, one begotten," F.; "smith," or "lancer," D.; "possessor" or "spearsman," M.—12. **Mahalaleel**] "Praise of God," G., D., M.; "praise or splendour of El," F.—15. **Jared**] "Descent," G., D.; "low ground," "water," or "marching down," F.; "going down," M.—18. **Enoch**] "Initiated," or "initiating," G.; "teacher," "initiator," F.; "teaching," or "initiation" ? D.; "initiation," "instruction," M.—21. **Methuselah**] "Man of a dart," G.; "man of military arms," F.; "missile man," D.; "man of the missile," M—.25. **Lamech**] "Strong," or "young man," G.; "overthrower" (of enemies), "wild-man," F.; "destroyer," D.; "man of prayer," "youth," M.—29. **Noah**] ("Rest"), G.; "consolation," or "rest," F.; "rest," or "comfort," D.; "rest," M.—32. **Shem**] ("Name"), G.; "name," "renown," "height," F.; "celebrity," D.; "name," "fame," M. **Ham**] "Hot," G., M.; "dark-coloured," "black," F.; "swarthy," D.—**Japhet**] "Widely-extending," G.; "extender," or "spreader"; "or "beautiful" ? (of white races), F.; "extension," D.; "spreading," M.

"In general little reliance can be placed upon the etymological significance of these early names as given by the lexicographers, whether we regard them as purely Hebrew, or as having been transferred from some older Shemitic tongue. In a few of them, however, there appear contrasts that can hardly be mistaken. Thus, for example, between Seth, the *established*, the *firm*, and Enosh, the *weak*, the *frail* (βροτός, *mortalis*, *homo*), the contrast is similar to that between Cain and Abel (*gain*, as the promised seed, and *vanity* or *disappointment*), as though the hopes of men, from generation to generation, were alternately rising and falling."—*Prof. T. Lewis, in Lange's "Genesis."*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—32.

DISTINGUISHED MEN.

History is full of distinguished men, and it is interesting to study how they became so. There are many methods of becoming a distinguished man, and we shall notice a few as suggested by the names contained in this immortal chapter of early history.

I. **Some men are rendered distinguished by the peculiarity of the times in which they live.** Adam was thus distinguished. He was the first human being to inhabit the earth, to look out upon its bright glories, and to care for its produce. He was the first human being to hold sweet communion with God, and to feel the rapture of holy prayer. He was also, with his wife, the first human being to be led astray, into the woful experiences of sin, by the devil. Hence Adam as the first man is invested with a most wonderful and interesting history, from the time of his coming into the world, over which he had no control. God made him, and he entered into life under these unexceptionable circumstances. Hence his fame. Had Adam lived in these days the probabilities are that his name would have been unknown to the crowd, and unspoken by the multitude. He was not by any means a man of great genius. We are not aware that he had any extraordinary mental or moral gifts, he was commonplace in the measure of his soul. We do not read that like Cain he built a city, or that like Jabal he was the father of such as dwelt in tents, or that like Jubal he was efficient in musical arts and accomplishments, or that like Tubal Cain he was capable of numerous mechanical artifices. He was simply an ordinary man, who in different times, under less extraordinary circumstances, would not have attracted the slightest public attention, and in this respect Adam is a type of multitudes whose lives are chronicled in the world's history. They were not intrinsically great men, either in their intellectual abilities or moral sentiments. They never once in their lives had a thought so sublime that they were under the necessity of calling for pen and ink to pursue an angel clad in such bright clothing. They were never capable of moral passion. Their lives were a stagnation, there were no great billows of impulse rolling in as from a great heart, indicative of the wild music of the soul. They were men, and that was all. You could see all they were. You could hear all they had. They were possessed of no unknown quality of being. Yet they rise to fame. Yes! But there was nothing meritorious in their notoriety. They were renowned because they could not help it. Some men are fortunate in the accidents of their lives. They happen to be born in a certain family, at a certain time, and as a consequence they become the world's rulers and favourites. Such men should learn that a true and worthy fame is not the outcome of time or circumstance, but of earnest personal effort and achievement. It is not unlikely that the man who is born a hero may die a fool. He will be greater at his birth than at his death. At his birth wise men may come to pay him homage, but at his death there may be none to attend his funeral. Thus we find that some are distinguished men from the mere circumstances of their advent into the world.

II. That some men are rendered distinguished by their marvellous longevity.—We find that the men whose names are given in this list were remarkable for the length of their lives, Methuselah living to the age of nine hundred and sixty-nine years. There are multitudes of men who are remarkable for nothing else but their longevity. They had a good physical manhood, and consequently they were enabled to endure the storm of life for many years. They were men of bone and muscle rather than of thought and moral energy. They would be more useful in the army than in the church; better soldiers than Christian workers. But we gauge men's lives by a wrong estimate. We cannot measure a man's life by the number of years he has passed in the burden and battle of the world. A long life may be lived in a very short space of time, and a number of years may be the chronicle of a brief life. Man's truest life is spent in and measured by deeds, thoughts, sympathies, and heroic activities. A man may live a long life in one day. He has during the day been instrumental in the salvation of one soul, then in that day he has lived a short eternity. A man who writes in a year a thoughtful book, which shall instruct and culture the minds of men, lives a century in that brief space of time. The schoolmaster who teaches a boy to think, the minister who helps men to be pure and good, the gentle spirits who aid by visitation and prayer the sorrowful and the sick, these are the world's longest lives, these are the world's true Methuselahs. Hence we should endeavour to live well if we would live long. Immortality will consist in moral goodness rather than in the flight of ages. But society is hardly awake to this measurement of time and this computation of the years.

and hence it still continues to laud the man of three score years and ten, and to reckon him amongst its curiosities. Society gives fame to many men because it regards them in this light. We cannot say that such a fame is worthy of envy. Grey hairs, when found in the paths of rectitude, are worthy of all honour and respect, but he who can find no other claim upon the world's admiration is destitute of that which can alone win the truest homage of mankind.

III. That some men are rendered distinguished by the villainy of their moral conduct. There are many in this list whose lives are characterized by utter degeneracy. In the first verse we are told that God created man in his own pure image, and then by way of contrast, and of shewing the extent of the fall of man, we have given several names by way of illustration. The image of God and the life of man is in terrible contrast. But it is well that sin is not always made known in its full extent in human history. These verses do not contain a record of the sins of which some of the men named were guilty. They sum up the life in a name. History cannot write the wickedness of men. It is too dark for the pen to sketch. It would be too awful for the world to read and contemplate. When men die it is well that the remembrance of their sins should be buried with them. Their villainies are best forgotten. But history will not altogether permit the sins of men to pass from remembrance. The annals of crime soon allow their heroes to banish from the world's memory. But monarchs who have been despots, place-seekers who have been murderers, and the outbreaks of popular rage, are retained on the pages of history. And these men owe their historic distinction to their crimes. Crime soon brings men into unenviable fame; a fame they had better be without.

IV. That some men are rendered distinguished by their ancestral line of descent. This chapter contains the line from Adam to Noah, in which are stated some common particulars concerning all, and certain special details concerning three of them. The genealogy is traced to the tenth in descent from Adam and terminates with the flood. The scope of the chapter is to mark out the line of faith, and hope, and holiness from Adam, the first head of the human race to Noah, who became eventually the second natural head of it. And so it is, some men are only known in the line of their ancestral relationships. They are slight links in a great chain. They are feeble lights in a grand constellation. Their greatness is reflected from the toils or achievements of others who have lived before them. They catch a borrowed lustre. Such lives are the relief of history. They subdue its grandeur. They contrast with its pageantry. They make it approachable. If the pages of history were filled with the exploits and records of men essentially and intrinsically great, they would be unapproachable by the ordinary reader. Hence we gladly welcome, now and then in its annals, the little manhood of great ancestry, but destitute of moral force.

V. That some men are rendered distinguished by their true and exalted piety.—We are told in this chapter, that Enoch walked with God and was not, for God took him. This is a distinction of the very truest kind, it arises from the moral purity of the soul. It is not always that the men who walk the most intimately with God are the most famous on earth. Sometimes they are persecuted. They are often rejected by the common multitude. Some envy the beauty of their moral characters. Others mock them. But the favour of national crowds is very fickle and transient, and is not worth having. But the favour of all worthy spirits will ever be the heritage of the good. Heaven will also take notice of them, and cause its benediction to rest upon them. Good men are the true kings of the world, the true prophets, the great victors, and the only ones worthy of permanent fame and celebration. And when the great ones of the earth, whose praise has been from men, shall be forgotten, then the good shall shine as stars in the Kingdom of God for ever and ever. Then let all young men seek the distinction which cometh from above, that only is worthy their search, and alone will repay the energies of their immortal souls. LESSONS:—1. *That a good old age is often the heritage of man.* 2. *That noble lineage is the heritage of others.* 3. *That true piety may be the heritage of all.* 4. *That true piety has a substantial reward as well as a permanent record.*

I. The longevity of the antediluvian race. Here are men who lived through periods varying from eight hundred to almost a thousand years. *This longevity might be explained on natural principles.* These men inherited good constitutions; they were of stalwart frames, with pure blood coursing through their veins, and every part of their organization well strung together. The varying temperatures, the fogs and malaria belonging to these western regions, so inimical to health, had no place in their land. Their diet was simple; those intoxicating beverages and unwholesome confectionaries which come to our tables were probably unknown to them. They knew not the anxieties and competitions of the merchant. Who but God can tell how long the human body organically strong, and thus guarded, would live? *Their longevity was for special ends.* It served to populate the world. It supplied the want of a written revelation. From the death of Adam to the call of Abraham was a period of about eleven hundred years. During that period a large population grew, discoveries were made, great deeds were wrought, great communications received from God; but there was no historian to hand down to the children the experiences of their sires. Thus the longevity of man supplied the place of books. *Their longevity contributed to their depravity.* The fear of death somewhat restrains evil even in the worst men. Death is a useful minister. Were the Herods, the Neros, the Napoleons to live nine hundred years, would society be better than hell? As long as depravity is in the world, it is necessary there should be mortality.

II. The poverty of human history. All that we have of the human race for upwards of a thousand years is to be found in these verses. The myriads who lived during this period sustained the same relation to each other, to God, and to the universe as we do; and the ideas, feelings and habits common to the race were theirs. Each had a history of his own, but there is no record, the pale of oblivion is over them. They are only *mentioned.* There is an awful sadness in this. To leave the world in which we have lived and laboured, enjoyed and suffered, and to be forgotten for ever, is humbling to our vanity, and sickening to our very heart. The millions are forgotten as a dream, a few years after their death. A few by literature and art are kept in memory a little longer; but the hour comes with them, when the last letter in their names is washed out from the sands of life by the tidal wave of time.

III. The materializing tendencies of sin. All that is recorded here of these great men, except Enoch, is that they begat sons and daughters. There is no harm in this, but there is no *virtue* in it. There is in it that which indicates their alliance with the lower creation, nothing to indicate their alliance with the spiritual universe and with God. There is no spiritual act here recorded of them. It is not said that they read the meaning of some page in the volume of nature, or that they reared altars to the God of heaven. Why are these things not recorded? Because not accomplished? Why? Had they not souls? Had they not a God to worship? Their souls were materialized. The material pleasures are the pleasures taught by the million.

IV. The inevitableness of man's mortality. These men lived hundreds of years, yet it is said of each, "he died." Death may delay his work, but does not forget his mission. No money can bribe death, no power can avert his blow.

"All that tread
The globe, are but a handful to the tribes
That slumber in its bosom."

V. The blessedness of practical Godliness. "Enoch walked with God." This expression implies *an abiding consciousness of God's presence.* He "saw Him who is invisible." The Divine presence was not with him a mere dogma; it was a living conscious fact. He felt God nearer to him than nature, nearer than any other being, the constant companion of his spirit. The language implies *cordial fellowship.* To walk with another implies a mutual sympathy and agreement of soul. *Spiritual progress.* He walks, every step bearing him onward into higher truths and richer experiences.—(*Homilist.*)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1—2. Providence has made a sufficient register of the rise, growth, and state of the Church to satisfy faith rather than curiosity.

The genealogy of the Church revealed by God ought to be known and believed by men.

God's will is that His Church should

be propagated by generation, not by creation.

The generations of the Church were ordered to be from Adam fallen, that grace might appear.

The record of man's creation in God's image is necessary to be studied by man in his fall.

God's blessing only makes man fruitful to propagate His Church.

One name and nature has God given to both sexes of man, that they may learn their union in conjugal estate.

Verses 3—5. The Spirit of God hath taken care to give a sufficient chronology unto the Church from the first.

Some distance of time may be in delaying the reforming seed of the Church, but it shall come.

Sinful Adam begets his seed in his full image, sinful as himself.

Grace can make a sinful seed of man to be a settled Church reformer.

Providence gave large progenies, and long time, to the first fathers.

The Spirit has willingly silenced the history of all the first times but of the Church.

God's pleasure has been to give the world a full witness of his creation.

ENOCH, ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREAT TEACHERS.

Verse 22—24. (Compare Gen. v. 22—24; Hebrews xi. 5; and Jude 14, 15.) There are three very strange things that strike us in connection with the history of Enoch. *It is strange that so little is said about him.* The verses we have read comprehend all our reliable knowledge of him. It is true that there is a book called by his name—a book which, although perhaps as ancient as the Epistles, is evidently apocryphal, and therefore not to be trusted. Reference is also made to him in Ecclesiasticus, a book which, although bound up in some of our Bibles, has no right to a place in canonical writings. One might have expected that a man who lived so many years as he did, lived a life so divine and useful, would have had an ampler history in the Book of God. Another thing that strikes us as strange in this man's history is *the comparative shortness of his stay on earth.* It is true that he was here three hundred and sixty-five years, a period which, although commanding a space equal to ten of our generations, was not so much as half of the age of many of his contemporaries. We should have thought that he would have lived longer than the wicked around him. Another thing that strikes us as strange in this man's history *is the manifest singularity of the life he lived.*

I. He taught the world by his life. 1. "*He walked with God.*" 2. "*He had the testimony that he pleased God.*" How this testimony came to him we are not told. It is not necessary to suppose that it came in any miraculous way. It was the testimony of his conscience. How blessed such consciousness. Such a life as his was indeed a *teaching* life. As the load-star seems to beam more brilliantly in the firmament, the darker grows the clouds that float about it, so Enoch's life must have been a luminous power in his age of black depravity. There is no teaching like *life* teaching. All mere verbal and professional teaching is as the tinkling cymbal to this true trump of God. It is the most *intelligible* teaching. Men reason against your Paleys, but they can't reason against a good life. It is the most *constant* teaching. Letter and logic teaching is only occasional. But life teaching is constant. Its light streams through all the acts and events of every day life. It is not the brooklet that rattles after the shower, and is silent in the drought, but it is the perennial river rolling in all seasons, skirting its pathway with life and beauty, and reflecting on its bosom the heavens of God.

II. He taught the world by his translation. "He was not." The expression, "was not found," suggests that he was missed and sought for. Such a man would be missed. No doubt his age knew him well. How he was taken to heaven we know not. We learn—1. *That death is not a necessity of human nature.* He did not see death. There are those who say that men are made to die; that, like all organized bodies, their dissolution is inevitable; that death with them, as with all animal existence, is a law of nature. Hence they say that the doctrine that men die because of sin is a mere theological fiction. It is also said that God intended men to die, otherwise He would not have allowed them to multiply so rapidly without giving them a world immeasurably larger than this. The translation of Enoch is an answer to all this. It shows that if death is the law of man's nature, God is stronger than law, and can annul it at His pleasure. If the earth can only support a limited number of men, God could have taken a thousand generations in the same way. 2. *That there is a sphere of human existence beyond this.* Perhaps the men in those antediluvian times had lost all ideas of a future state of being. The translation of Enoch would reveal another sphere of life to them. 3. *That there is a God in the universe who approves of goodness.* 4. *That the mastering of sin is the way to a grand destiny.* Just as a man overcomes sin, and walks closely with his Maker, he gets translated.

III. He taught the world by His preaching. Jude gives a specimen of his preaching, and it includes three things:—1. *The advent of the Judge.* 2. *The gathering of the saints.* 3. *The conversion of sinners.*—(*Homilist.*)

THE HEAVENLY WALK.

I. That it may be pursued notwithstanding the prevalency of sin around. The age in which Enoch lived was, probably, the darkest the world has ever known. It had wandered from God in thought, in purpose, in worship, and in life. It was altogether degenerate. We have a Divine description of it. 1. *Lust was made the basis of marriage.* "And the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose." 2. *The longevity of man was productive of sin.* "And the Lord said, my spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years." 3. *Violence was prevalent amongst men.* "There were giants in the earth in those days." "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This is God's description of the age in which Enoch was called to live. He was one star amid the darkness. He was one ray of light in the terrible storm of evil. He was one flower in that neglected garden. He was an oasis in the desert of wickedness. His life was in sublime contrast to all around him. He was the prophet of the age. He was the guide of the age. He was the benefactor of the age. This shows the intrinsic force of a godly spirit, in that it can repel the sin by which it is surrounded, and keep its own conscience from defilement. This shows three things:—(1.) *That man can be good notwithstanding the natural depravity of his heart.* (2.) *Notwithstanding the wickedness of his companions.* Man is not the creature of circumstances. He need not commit sin because he is surrounded by it. He can repel it in the home—in the workshop—whatever may be the disadvantages of his condition His surroundings are no excuse for evil doing. The soul can rise above them into the heavenly path of fellowship with God. (3.) *That man can be good notwithstanding the difficulty of the Christian life.* It is not an easy thing to be a Christian. It is not natural for man to be good. Goodness is a conflict. Straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leads into the paths of moral rectitude. But this need not impede the spiritual progress of the soul in the ways of God, even in the most degenerate times. The darkness calls for light, and wickedness needs piety in its midst, if only to keep it from utter ruin, and to pray for its reformation.

II. That it may be pursued in the very prime of busy manhood. The life of Enoch was a comparatively busy one; he died in the prime of manhood. And yet at this period he was celebrated for his moral goodness. Some people have an idea that piety is all very well for little children, for women who are comparatively unoccupied, and for the aged; but they intimate that for men in the prime of life, in the midst of business, and who are thus in severe competition with the world, that it is an absurdity and an impossibility. These men hope soon to amass a fortune and retire from active life, and then they will commence the period of devotion. Who can estimate the folly and the moral wrong of such an idea? Piety is good for the most active business man. It will enrich his soul. It will sooth his care. It will quiet his anxiety. It will refresh his soul. It will give him the guidance of a Divine Father. Men can be honest in business. Multitudes are. They prosper the best. If the age is sinful, it likes to do business with a reliable man. Let the business men of England seek to enter upon the heavenly walk so gladly enjoyed by Enoch.

III. That it may be pursued in the very midst of domestic anxiety and care. "And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters." He was not the mere creature of passion. He was not materialistic in his ideas. He walked with God amidst his family enjoyments, duties, and anxieties. Many people have lost their religion through the increase of domestic cares. But a godly soul can walk with God in family life, and take all its offspring in the same holy path. Enoch would instruct his children in the right way. He would pray for them. He would commend them to his Divine Friend. Happy the home where such a godly parent is at its head.

IV. That it may be pursued into the very portals of heaven and eternal bliss. Enoch walked with God, and one day walked right into heaven with Him. Heaven is but the continuation of the holy walk of earth. Going to heaven does not imply a cessation in the walk of moral goodness. With the good man life on earth naturally breaks into the glory of the skies. Some people imagine that heaven will consist in a miraculous change wrought upon the soul whereby it will enter into some grand, inexplicable sphere of being. No: Heaven is the soul's walk with God on earth, rendered closer and more spiritual by the conditions of the new life above. The soul's walk with God is a progress to eternal light. Let our prayer be—

"O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame;
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!"

Enoch: Accounting for Men's Disappearance from the Earth.

"God took him."

I. We should take an interest in the destiny of men.

II. We should recognize the hand of God in the removal of men.

III. We should believe in the particularity of God's oversight of men. When God takes a good man—(1.) He takes that man to a *higher* blessing. (2.) He will fill that man's place as a Christian worker *upon earth*. (3.) He trains survivors towards self-reliance and emulous work. Or, thus: 1. God took him — the assertion of a sovereign right. 2. God took him—an illustration of Divine regard. 3. God took him—an assurance of eternal blessedness. 4. God took him — a pledge that all like him will be associated. (*City Temple.*)

God of his own will hath chosen some eminent witness to bear out His name to all ages—Enoch, Elijah.

Eminent piety becomes those who are God's chosen witnesses in a dark age.

Men who walk with God must discover Him to others.

God will take and crown those souls that walk with Him.

The advantages of walking with God: 1. The best security. 2. The purest happiness. 3. It will secure eternal life.

Verse 25—27. The longest life on earth:—It will not give perfection. 2. It will yield to change. 3. It may yield to sin. 4. It must die.

Verse 28—31. Outward names may be the same to the righteous and the wicked. Chapter iv. 18. Compare v. 28.

God has set times for eminent refreshing to His church.

The first times before the flood had real and typical discoveries of God's rest in Christ.

God makes the names of his seed prophetical of the peace of His church.

Verse 32. A stated and full time of warning does God vouchsafe to men of His requirements.

It is a blessing upon the holiest to have families.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER V.

BY THE

REV. WM. ADAMSON.

Adam! Ver. 1. The Apocalypse of Moses is a mythical narrative of the sickness and death of Adam and Eve. In it Adam is represented on his expulsion as petitioning the seraphim to allow him to carry away some of the perfume of Paradise. The boon is granted, and Adam takes that aroma of Eden which afterwards became the sacrificial incense. It also narrates how Adam sent his son Seth to go and fetch the oil of consolation, which flows from the Tree of Life in Paradise—and how this favour was refused him because he was appointed unto death.

> "Yes, I must die—I feel that I must die;
> And though to me has life been dark and dreary,
> Yet do I feel my soul recoil within me
> As I contemplate the dim gulf of death."
> —*White.*

Adam's Death! Ver. 5. Tradition has invented an account of the last scene. Scarcely had he breathed his last than his soul was carried away by angels, and his body borne into Eden—there to await the resurrection. The death of him, who was created for eternal life, and was not to die, produces a deep tremor of awe throughout the universe. The earth refuses to receive his body—the sun and moon cover themselves with a veil—and wonders are wrought far and wide; all of which accounts are no doubt as deserving of Christian credence as are the startling phantoms of heathen prodigy or Roman calendar. Seth is represented as stating that Adam was buried by him in the "Cave of Treasures"—along with the incense and myrrh from Paradise—to which cave came in after times the magi to obtain the frankincense and myrrh which were brought to the Infant Saviour.

Godless Grey-hairs! Ver. 9. There is not a more repulsive spectacle than an old man who will not forsake the world, which has already forsaken him. As Spurgeon so wittily and weightily says, of all fools, a fool with a grey head is the worst fool anywhere. With one foot in the grave, and another foot on a sandy foundation, of him it may be asked: A few more nights, and where art thou!

> "What folly can be ranker! Like our shadows
> Our wishes lengthen as our sun declines:
> No wish should loiter then this side the grave."—*Young.*

Despots! Ver. 9. In pictured stone we see traces which speak of perfectly-organized, strong and beautiful life, and a record there also of imperfection and deformity; as in the records of the Bible are traces not only of those who excel in virtue, but of those who made a strong impression on their age through the magnitude of their vileness. Among such are those mentioned in this chapter. But

> "Think'st thou there is no tyranny but that
> Of blood and chains! The despotism of vice,
> The weakness and the wickedness of luxury."
> —*Byron.*

Adam to Noah! Ver. 9. The golden age was the first period of history in which truth—right—innocence and happiness universally prevailed. There were no instruments of war, and the earth brought forth her fruits spontaneously. Spring was perpetual—flowers grew up spontaneously—the rivers flowed with milk and wine, and honey dropped from the boughs of the oak. Then came the silver age—then the savage brazen age—then the murderous iron age, followed by the flood of Deucalion—while

> "Faith fled, and piety in exile mourned:
> And Justice, here opprest, to heaven returned." —*Dryden.*

Ancestry! Ver. 10. King James I., in his progress in England, was entertained at Lumley Castle, the seat of the Earl of Scarborough. A relative of the noble earl was very proud in showing and explaining to his Majesty an immensely large genealogical line of the family. The pedigree he carried back rather farther than the greatest strength of credulity would allow, whereupon the witty Monarch quietly remarked that "he did not know before that Adam's name was Lumley."

> "Of all the wonders which the eventful life
> Of man presents—
> Not one so strange appears as this alone,
> That man is proud of what is not his own."
> —*More.*

Memorials! Ver. 14. When we explore the caverns of Egypt we come upon the sculptured forms of ape and ibis. These serve to illustrate the shapes and idolatries of human conceits. They speak to us in language more powerful than the most minute details of history. And so, when we examine the vaults of pre-Noachic man, we come upon the names of successive generations which suffice to exemplify to us life-history of that era. They testify with more power and fulness than if there were a thousand rolls inscribed with their deeds and thoughts.

"Those strong records,
Those deathless monuments alone shall show
What, and how great, the Roman Empire was."
—*May.*

Rivers! Ver. 17. Life bears us on like the stream of a mighty river. Our boat glides down the narrow channel, through the playful murmuring of the little brook, and the winding of its grassy borders. The trees shake their blossoms over our young heads, and the flowers on the brink seem to offer themselves to our young hands; we are happy in the hope, and grasp eagerly at the beauties around us—but the stream hurries on, and still our hands are empty. Our course in youth and manhood is along a wider flood, amid objects more striking and magnificent. We are animated at the moving pictures of enjoyment and industry passing us—we are excited at some short-lived disappointment.

"It may be that the breath of love,
Some leaves on its swift tide driven,
Which, passing from the shores above,
Have floated down from heaven."—*Bell.*

The stream bears us on, and our joys and grief are alike left behind us. We may be shipwrecked; we cannot be delayed. Whether rough or smooth, the river hastens to its home, till the tossing of the waves is beneath our feet, and the land lessens from our eyes, and floods are lifted around us, and we take our leave of earth and its inhabitants until of our further voyage there is no witness but the Infinite and Eternal.—(*Heber.*)

Antiquity! Ver. 20. Wandering during a bright autumnal afternoon over one of the loftiest chalk cliffdowns in our island, and often looking out over the great far-stretching ocean that rolled up in monotonous murmurs to the foot of the precipitous white rock walls, on the top of which he then stood, Mr. Leifchild was deeply impressed with a feeling of the limitations of all human knowledge. Down below, some 800 feet under him, and for many miles before him was the vast unsounded sea. High up above that was the lofty, inaccessible sky. Immediately beneath his feet were solid layers upon layers of accumulated and piled-up chalk. He beheld the sea and sky under a full sunshine, but he knew nothing absolutely of what was in them—of what was below them—of what was above them. Even of the visible and sea-derived rock underneath, he knew little more than that it was the white sepulchre of countless centuries—the mighty monument of historic ages—the dead deposit of once boundlessly swarming life. So may we stand in regard to the generations of men recorded in Gen. 5. We see around and above them; but we cannot see what is in them. Full blazing light is *over* all, but light is not *in* all.

"When fain to learn we lean into the dark,
And grope to feel the floor of the abyss."
—*Ingelow.*

Faith-vision! Ver. 24. Birds have an extraordinary power of changing the focus of the lens of their eye, at will and instantly. By this means they are enabled to perceive distant objects invisible to human gaze, as if just under their beaks. The optician cannot give you an eye-glass to distinguish with equal clearness near objects and remote. Yet birds possess this power. And so the Christian possesses this twofold spiritual vision. The prophet Enoch—without increasing or diminishing—was able to cause the faith of his soul to change instantly the globular form of the crystalline lens, and thus augment the power of refraction. Looking at will and instantly, he could see the sins near at hand, and yet behold the grand solemnities of the last assize far off.

"From Adam to his youngest heir,
Not one shall 'scape that muster-roll;
Each, as if he alone were there,
Shall stand, and win or lose his soul."
—*Montgomery.*

Immortality! Ver. 24. All heathen nations have believed in the immortality of the soul. The Greeks and Romans had their Hades—their Elysian fields—their infernal regions; but these, as Macmillan remarks, were only ghost worlds, inhabited by the shades of the departed. They felt that the dust could not be the end of him who has been privileged to walk with God among the trees of the garden, and to hold communion with the Divine in the thoughts that breathe and words that burn in all the magnificence of Nature's creation.

"Thus man
Was made upright, immortal made, and crowned
The king of all."—*Pollok.*

Wickedness! Ver. 22. There was never a ray of starlight in the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky—only the red glare of torches ever lights its walls. So there were many men in the era from Adam to Noah whose minds were all underground, and unlighted save by the torches of selfishness and passion.

"Meanwhile the earth increased in wickedness,
And hasted daily to fill up her cup."
—*Pollok.*

Family! Ver. 22. The religious father may be regarded in his family as the keystone to the arch of a building which binds and holds all the parts of the edifice together. If this keystone be removed, the fabric will tumble to the ground, and all its parts be separated from each other. Or, he is to his family as the good shepherd, under whose protection and care the flock may go in and out, and find pasture; but when the shepherd is smitten, the sheep will be scattered. Yet

"His hand who rent shall bind again,
With firmer links, thy broken chain,
To be complete for ever."
—*Fitzarthur.*

Holy Walk! Ver. 24. The Emperor of Germany was one day visiting one of the public schools of Prussia; and, being desirous of personally testing the intelligence of the children, he held up a stone, and enquired to what "kingdom" it belonged. Having received the reply that it was a member of the mineral kingdom, he held up a little flower, and repeated the question to what kingdom it rightly belonged. The prompt response was given that it was classed in the vegetable kingdom; whereupon the veteran monarch, drawing himself up to his full stature, enquired: "To what kingdom do I belong?" To his pleased surprise, a voice immediately shouted: "To the kingdom of heaven." True indeed of the aged champion of the Kingdom of Christ on earth; would that it could be said of every child of man: "To the kingdom of heaven!" This is secured by "walking with God;" and

> "Though small the seedling, from it grows
> Heaven's boundless bliss."—*Judson.*

CHAPTER VI.

Critical Notes.—2. Sons of God.]—That these were angels is a view which, it is well-known, has been held from ancient times, both by Jews and Christians. Of the latter class may be named Justin and Tertullian among the ancients, and Luther, Stier, Baumgarten, Kurtz and Delitzsch among the moderns. Notwithstanding the weight of these names, we must, in preference, stand with those who decidedly oppose this interpretation; and this, for the following, among other reasons. (1.) We *need not* leave the human family to find these "sons of God," having already a basis for this noble title in the spiritual nearness of the Sethites to God (cf. Deut. xiv. 1; xxxii. 5; Ps. lxxiii. 15; Pro. xiv. 26; Luke iii. 38.) (2.) We interrupt the "*genesis*" of the book, if we go farther than man: it is, physically, a pure human development so far. (3.) We set aside the *natural generators* of the race, the *fathers*—to make way for *angels and women!* (4.) We destroy the representative nature of this apostacy, putting it out of relation to those named in Num. xxv., Jud. iii., 1 Kings xi., xvi., Rev. ii. (5.) The story no longer serves for "our *admonition*" 1 Cor. x. 6.) It gratuitously imports what, with our present light, we must call a *monstrosity* (Matt. xxii. 30). That, in certain places (Job i. xxxviii.) *angels* are termed "sons of God," simply shows how extended the divine family is (cf. Eph. iii. 15, πᾶσα πατριὰ, "every family," or better perhaps, "an entire family"). **3. Strive with.]** Or, "judge in;" or "plead with:" "rule over" (Fürst, Davies); "be humbled in" (Gesenius); "remain, dwell in" (Sept., Vulg., Arabic, etc.)—**They also are flesh.]** Some render: "In their erring: they are flesh."—**14. Gopher wood.]** Probably, "cypress" (Conant, Davies); "pitch-trees, resinous trees" (Gesenius); "a hard, strong tree, precise kind unknown" (Fürst).—**18. Establish.]** Or, "set up again," "restore," as in Amos ix. 11; cf. 1 Pet. iv. 19.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—8.

A Degenerate World.

Sin does not take long to spread. A few ages ago and it only existed in one or two hearts; but now it is almost universal in its prevalence. A little while ago the world was new and pure, dwelling in joy; now it is old in sin, contaminated by wickedness, and frowning with woe. There is a terrible contagion in moral evil. It soon spreads from the individual to the community, from the centre to the circumference of social life. 1. *The organic unity of society is favourable to the spread of moral evil.* The domestic life of man affords great opportunity for the progress of either good or evil. If an evil disposition, or a wicked habit gains possession of one member of the family, it is very likely to influence the rest. This intimate community of daily life renders the inmates of the household potent in influences which shall form the character and destiny of each other. The family bond is intimate, and sensitive, and one touch of good or evil passes forcefully through it into the human soul. And in common society itself there are many and varied connections which are fraught with potent influences to the mind and heart of man. The master influences his servant; the manager influences those under his control, and the casual intercourse of daily life is influential in determining the moral character of multitudes. Hence a message flashed on the wires of our domestic and social being, reaches to known and unknown destinies. The words we speak to-day, may to-morrow determine the mental and spiritual condition of many people. Hence the conditions of our social existence are favourable to the dire contagion of evil. 2. *The native willingness of the human soul to do evil is favourable to the contagion of moral wrong.* Seldom do men need to be reasoned into the evil pursuits of conduct, and if they do, a fallacious argument is sufficient to convince them. They do not even require to be solicited or invited to the wrong, they are willing, nay, eager, to find companions who will join them in their carnal pleasures. The unregenerate soul goes in quest of evil, and will work it greedily. It has a native tendency to sin. Hence we are not surprised to find the world rioting in moral wrong, when it is utterly destitute of that love to God, which alone can keep it right. We have here the sad picture of a degenerate world:—

I. It is a world in which marriage is abused. "And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose." Thus we find that the longevity of men in those ages was productive of evil. Then one sinful life would extend much longer than at present, and consequently gave a greater encouragement and a more misleading example to wrong doers. The fear of death was largely removed, and men pursued their wicked pleasures without dread of the grave. 1. *We find that marriage was commenced on a wrong principle.* There has been a very long discussion as to the meaning of the phrases here used "the sons of God" and "the daughters of men." The former have been regarded as the sons of princes, of angels, and of Sethites or godly men; and the latter as people of the lower orders of mankind generally, and of the Cainites, or of the rest of mankind as contrasted with the godly. It is clear that angels cannot be intended by "the sons of God" in this context, as they do not marry, nor are they given in marriage. It is evident that men were punished for the crime, as the earth and not heaven was deluged by water; we may therefore conclude, that man was the guilty party. Besides, the angels fell long before these ages, probably prior to the creation of the terrestrial globe. Also men, and not angels, were subject to the strivings of the Holy Spirit, hence we conclude that they were alone in their guilt. *It is altogether wrong for the sons of God to marry the daughters of men.* True, in the first instance, the useful arts, and the embellishments of social life, began to flourish in the house of Cain. Agriculture, commerce, music, and poetry, were cultivated among his descendants. Were the children of Seth to forego the benefit of participating in these advantages thus introduced into the social system? Certainly not. As the children of God they were at liberty to prosecute any laudable undertakings in this direction, but could they not have done this without unholy alliances? It is better to give up the refinements of the world than to abandon good moral character in the effort to attain them. There can be no valid excuse for an alliance in marriage between the church and the world. The church should never ally itself in matrimony with the world. What sympathy can the morally pure and good have with the morally unholy. Summer cannot ally itself to winter. Genius cannot ally itself to ignorance. Life cannot ally itself to death. Neither ought the morally light in the Lord to ally themselves with the morally dark in Satan. Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers, is an injunction the church needs to remember. *We find also that physical beauty was made the basis of the matrimonial selection.* "The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair." Thus passion was the basis of the matrimonial life of the age. A man cannot be actuated by a meaner motive than this in seeking a wife. He needs mental intercourse and moral elevation and sympathy from her who is to be the companion of his life, and these are not always associated with physical beauty, nor will physical beauty compensate for their absence. The beauty of the face will soon fade. The moral beauty of the soul is untarnished by time, is rendered more lovely by the flight of years. It will be sought by the true man, who will care more for womanly excellence than for artistic beauty. *Much of the moral pollution of the age in which we live is due to unhallowed and injudicious marriages.* Many people are united in wedlock before they reach manhood and womanhood, and often have to struggle through life with a poverty sadly conducive to crime. They sink beneath the social wave, and perhaps never rise to true enjoyment. If the young people of the land would make more thoughtful and hallowed marriages, seeking partners of pious conviction, of genial spirit, of cultivated thought, and of thrifty habit, the pauperism, the business of our criminal law courts, and the debasing influences of society would be almost entirely swept away. The conjugal alliances of men largely determine the moral character of a community. 2. *We find that the marriage bond was violated by impurity.* Here is the evil of promiscuous intermarriage without regard to spiritual character. The first inlet of sin prepares the way for the flood-gates of iniquity. It would seem that the men of those days had as many wives as their passion desired; they took them wives of all which they chose. When a nation loses the purity of its domestic life, its national glory will soon depart. The divorce court is a true but sad index to the worth of our national character. Under these conditions of home life it is easy to imagine the speedy prevalence of sin recorded in these verses. Parents and not legislators are the true guardians of the world's moral purity.

II. It is a world in which violence prevails.—"There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown." 1. *Men of physical strength became the rulers of the people.* These giants were men of great physical energy, they were probably Cainites, and were much more violent than the Sons of God, and their descendants. Hence the warrior was the ruler of the age. Mere brute force, rather than legal right, or moral fitness, was the qualification for rulership. We have but little insight given in the inspired record, into the principles and method of government which prevailed in these early ages of the world, but it is probable that God himself was recognized as the true Governor of men; to Him offerings were brought, and to Him obedience ought to have been rendered. Hence we find that the strong men of the times in their self-imposed authority, were in direct rebellion to Jehovah. Surely we cannot imagine a more degenerate and lamentable condition of things than this, when all the foremost men of the day were in antagonism to the Supreme Ruler of the universe. But the people who seek to dethrone the Divine authority will speedily work their own ruin; nor was this an exception to the rule, and the destructive deluge shows how utterly impotent physical strength is in any contention with God. 2. *Men of physical strength were the popular favourites of the day.* They were men of fame. Fame was not during these ages achieved by rectorial equity and moral purity of character, but by deeds of daring and of blood. These giants were proud and haughty. They were impious. The offspring of these unholy marriages were the rulers of the advancing age, and their wicked training would well prepare them to perpetuate the violence and villainy of their fathers 3. *Men of physical strength were the terror of the day.* They had no regard to the rights of the poor; the weak were despised and injured; the good, if any were to be found, were persecuted; legal rectitude was unheeded by them. Force was the supreme law of the age. It was indeed a reign of terror. Multitudes would wish it at an end. Force is the very essence of sin. Sin always brings nations into anarchy. A violent government is a sure guarantee for the spread of moral defilement.

III. It is a world in which spiritual influences are rejected. "And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." 1. *This degenerate world had not been entirely left to its own inclination.* The world had not been entirely given up to the impurity of its domestic life, to the brutality of its violent measures, without the deep convictions of heaven being given, which were calculated to restrain its sin. It is not the economy of heaven to leave wickedness to itself until it plunges itself into its own hell. God mercifully endeavours to cleanse the impurity, and to subdue the violence of evil by the conviction and restraining influences of His Holy Spirit. Hence the augmented guilt and doom of the persistent wrong-doer. What would be the moral condition of the world without this corrective ministry, no human mind could conceive. God was indeed merciful to the apostate race in thus sending His Spirit to irradiate the darkened mind, to expostulate with the conscience of the violent, to prompt and strengthen holy resolve, and to bring back the heart of the world to Himself. But, alas! this glad result was not attained. The flesh prevailed. Life is a constant struggle between these two forces, the flesh of man and the Spirit of God, and but too often the issue is that of the degenerate times of which we write. 2. *The degenerate world rejected the holy influences of heaven.* The domestic impurity of the age did not yield to His holy touch. The giants of the age resisted the proper control he would put upon their violent energies. The age rejected the Spirit of God. Its individuals sought Him not. This is an awful possibility. Man is a free agent. He cannot be forced into compliance with rectitude. He must be a consenting party. The age that rejects the Spirit of God is truly in a degenerate and hopeless condition. It has no light to relieve its darkness. How many historic ages since these primitive times have been characterized by an utter absence of spiritual impulse and energy. They have been Godless. They have witnessed a strange growth of moral evil in the nations. 3. *The degenerate world was in danger of losing the holy and correcting influences of heaven.* "And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man." Heaven can afford to let the impure and violent men alone, because such will speedily achieve their own ruin. The violence of earth cannot injure the inhabitants of the heavens. It is only restrained for the good of man. If it is finally unrestrained, the Holy Spirit will leave the rebellious age to itself, until its impurity and violence shall be washed out and subdued by a great flood of waters. Irreparable punishment certainly follows the withdrawal of holy influences from the soul of man. It is a token of human obstinacy, and of the Divine displeasure. Our constant prayer should be, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

IV. It is a world under the immediate inspection of God. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." 1. *Thus God saw the wickedness of this ancient world.* All the impurity and evil of this ancient world was passing day by day under the eye of God. And not merely did He behold its outward phases, but also its inward; He not merely saw the violence with which the earth was filled, but also the moral evil with which the heart was polluted. He saw the imagination of the thought of the heart. He sees the fountain of sin. What a sight it must have been for the infinite purity to behold! God seeth the heart of man. If purity does not reign in the thought and soul of man, however excellent he may be otherwise, he is destitute of the first principle of good. Men only read the world's newspaper. God reads the world's heart. A solemn thought. Should calm the passion of the world. 2. *Thus God repented that He had made man.* The scripture is frank and unreserved, some men would say, imprudent or regardless of misconstruction in its statements of truth. Repentance ascribed to the Lord, seems to imply wavering or change of purpose in the eternal self-existent. But the sublime dictate of the inspired word is "God is not a man," &c. (Num. xxiii. 19). In sooth, every act here recorded, the observation, the resolve, the exception, seems equally with the repentance to jar with the unchangeableness of God. To go to the root of the matter, every act of the divine will, of creative power, or of interference with the order of nature, seems at variance with inflexibility of purpose. But, in the first place, man has a finite mind and a limited sphere of observation, and therefore is not able to conceive or express thoughts or acts exactly as they are in God, but only as they are in himself. Secondly, God is a spirit, and therefore has the attributes of personality, freedom, and holiness; and the passage before us is designed to set forth these in all the reality of their action, and therefore to distinguish the freedom of the eternal mind from the fatalism of inert matter. Hence, thirdly, these statements represent real processes of the Divine Spirit, analogous at least to those of the human. And, lastly, to verify this representation, it is not necessary that we should be able to comprehend or construe to ourselves in all its practical detail that sublime harmony which subsists between the liberty and the immutability of God. That change of state, which is essential to will, liberty, and activity, may be, for aught we know, and from what we know must be, in profound unison with the eternity of the Divine purpose. *(Dr. Murphy.)* This expression clearly shews the abhorrence with which God regarded the sins of the primitive but degenerate world, and was the prelude of impending doom. 3. *Thus God was grieved that he had made man.*

V. It is a world threatened with destruction by God. The resolve is now formed to sweep away man from the face of the earth. Hitherto men had died; now they are to be drowned. This will be a standing monument of the wrath of God against sin to all future ages. 1. *This threat was retributive.* 2. *This threat was comprehensive.* It included "man and beast and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air." Man is the head of creation, and hence all below him is included in his doom. If the head is stricken from the human body all the members become dead. So in creation. These inferior creatures of the universe are not moral, and therefore the violent termination of their life is not penal. 3. *This threat was mingled with mercy.* Many years were to elapse before its occurrence, hence every opportunity would be given to prepare for it. We do not read that the degenerate world sought its removal; it would rather seem that they did not believe it would be executed. Such is the unbelief, folly, and hardihood of the sinner. Lessons:—1. *To sanctify a long life by true piety lest it become a means of impurity.* 2. *To avoid unhallowed alliances.* 3. *To coincide with the convictions of the Spirit of God.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1—2. The worst of women may be characterized by outward beauty.

Large increase of population is often associated with moral corruption.

Corrupt women are great snares to the church.

Sons of God different to the daughters of men:—1. In disposition. 2. In profession. 3. In moral character. 4. In eternal destiny.

Eminent Sons of God by profession may be influenced by the lust of the eye, then they become:—1. Corrupt 2. Debased. 3. Violent. 4. Rebellious

The lust of the eye disposeth to all sensuality and adultery.

A numerous offspring is no sure sign of God's special favour.

Beauty is a dangerous bait, and lust is sharp sighted. It is not safe gazing on a fair woman. How many have died of the wound in the eye! No one means hath so enriched hell as beautiful faces. Take heed our eyes be not windows of wickedness and loopholes of lust [*Trapp*].

Let the church be aware of being entangled with the world. The society of the men of the world may have many advantages to hold out. Their daughters may be fair, they may have the power and policy of earth at their disposal, and they may excel in the arts of life, and in its busy commerce; and on all these grounds may be built many a specious reason for cultivating intercourse with them. There are these three modes of alliance with the ungodly, in family intercourse, in self defence and opposition to a common foe, and in the transaction of the common business of life, to which, in that early time, the family of Seth might be tempted; and they are the very snares into which God's people are ever apt to fall. In these three ways they are continually led to make concessions tending to worldly conformity, and to compromise their high standing and their holy testimony, on the side of the Lord and of His truth [*Dr. Candlish.*]

The mingling of that which is of God with that which is of man, is a special form of evil, and a very effectual engine, in Satan's hand, for marring the testimony of Christ on earth. This mingling may frequently wear the appearance of something very desirable; it may often look like a wider promulgation of that which is of God. Such is not the divine method of promulgating with, or of advancing the interests of those, who ought to occupy the place of witnesses for Him on the earth. Separation from all evil is God's principle; and this principle can never be infringed without serious damage to the truth [*C.H.M.*]

Verse 3. I. That the Spirit of God does exert an influence on man for the purpose of securing his best interest. Notice—1. *That this spiritual influence is universal.* No doubt respecting its possibility. He who made man can influence him. 2. *That this spiritual influence is essential to the production of good.* Human nature is depraved, and therefore incapable of itself of producing anything good. As every drop of rain which falls from the clouds, and every spring that issues from the rocky mountains, comes from the mighty oceans; as the light which makes every planet and satellite gleam in the dark void of space comes from the sun; so does all good in man proceed from the Spirit of God. 3. *That this spiritual influence is, in every case, limited by the conditions of man's free agency.* Nothing compulsory in its nature. If religion be virtue, man in becoming religious must act from choice and not from necessity. 4. *That this spiritual influence is effective in proportion to the adaptation of the means by which it acts upon men's minds.* Nature. Providence. Chiefly the gospel.

II. That the Spirit of God may cease to influence men for good. This proved by facts. Saul (1 Sam. xxviii. 15); Belshazzar (Dan. v.); Jews in time of Jeremiah (Jer. xv. 1).

III. That the Spirit of God ceases to influence man for good because of man's continued rebellion. "For that he also is flesh." The word "flesh" is often used in Scripture to denote the sinfulness of man. This ceasing to strive may not be the result of a positive act of withdrawal of heavenly influences, so much as that of the law of nature which determines that the momentum of any moving body is diminished by constant resistance. In the moral universe, as well as in the physical, this law operates.

IV. That the benevolence of God is manifested in the manner in which spiritual influences are withdrawn from man. "Yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." 1. *The withdrawal never happens till after a long period of existence.* 2. *It never happens suddenly, but gradually.* 3. *It never happens without sufficient warning.*—(*Evan Lewis in Homilist.*)

I. A wonderful fact implied. The Holy Spirit shines with man. 1. *Remarkable Power.* Man can refuse to obey the Creator. 2. *Amazing divine condescension.* 3. *Astonishing human obduracy.* 4. *A merciful reason.* Why not abandon man. Love of God. 5 *The benevolent purpose.* That man may forsake sin. 6. *The mysterious method.*

II. An alarming fact stated. 1. *A calamity of awful magnitude.* 2. *Most melancholy.*—(*Homilist*).

God may hold His peace at the lustful uncleanness of sinners for a long time, but He will finally speak with terror.

It is God's word of threatening which is through revelation, which is declared by His preachers.

God's Spirit strives for, with, and in men by the ministry for their salvation.

God may prohibit his Spirit any more to labour with rebellious souls.

Divine forbearance:—1. Long manifested. 2. Fearfully abused. 3. Finally withdrawn. 4. Must end in salvation or ruin.

Verse 4. Giants in natural might and power may be also giants in sin.

God's earth is made the habitation of all impiety and wickedness by mighty sinners.

The greatest might of sinners is but earthly.

Giants in sin are most violent with God when He strives to save them.

Unholy alliances between the Church and the world bring forth these giants.

Sin taketh a mighty power to itself:—1. Renown. 2. Antiquity. 3. Valour. 4. Dominion.

It is but a contemptible name and power with God which the mightiest of sinners have.

The names of sinners are recorded in God's word that they may be abhorred.

Extent of Man's Wickedness.

Verse 5. The extent of man's wickedness is far greater than the generality of mankind have any conception of. Not merely words blameworthy, but also his heart. God looks chiefly at the heart. The heart of every man naturally wicked. In this verse God assigns His reason for destroying the whole world by a universal deluge.

I. The testimony of God respecting man. He speaks more immediately respecting the antediluvian world. *In general*, the wickedness of man was great in the earth. Every species of wickedness was committed in the most shameless manner. But *more particularly*, "the hearts" of men were evil; "the thoughts" of their hearts were evil; "the imaginations" of the thoughts were evil, and this too without exception, without mixture, without intermission; for *every* imagination was evil, and "*only*" evil, and that *continually*. What an awful statement. But how could this be ascertained? Only by God (Prov. xvi. 2). This is His testimony, after a thorough inspection of every human being. The same must be spoken of man at this day. Proved by observation. What has been the state of your *hearts*? Pride, anger, impure thoughts have sprung up in them. If occasionally a transient thought of good has arisen how coldly has it been entertained, how feebly has it operated, how soon has it been lost. Compared with what the law requires, and what God and His Christ deserve at your hands, do we not fall short of our duty?

II. What effect it should produce upon you. 1. *Humiliation.* On review of our words and actions we have all reason to be ashamed. Who amongst us could bear to have all his thoughts disclosed? Yet God beholds all; and has a perfect recollection of all that has passed through our minds from infancy. We ought to be humble. Our religious thoughts, when compared with what they ought to have been in number and intensity, are no less a ground of humiliation than those which have sprung from a more impure source; since they prove how defective are our conceptions of God's excellency, and how faint our sense of the Redeemer's love. 2. *Gratitude.* God sent His Son that through Him all our iniquities might be forgiven. Is not gratitude due to Him in return? 3. *Fear.* Though your hearts are renewed by divine grace, it is only in part; you have still the flesh within you, as well as the spirit. I need not tell you what precautions people take, when they carry a light in the midst of combustibles, which, if ignited, will spread destruction all around. Know, that ye carry such combustibles about you, and you know not how soon you may come in contact with somewhat that may cause an explosion. David, "Be ye, then, not high-minded; but fear."—(*Simeon.*)

God sees otherwise than man, such as are men of name here are men of shame with God.

Increase of sin after warning from God is full of provocation.

Moral evil:—1. Universal. 2. Bitter. 3. Multiplied. 4. Aggravated. 5. Outspreading. 6. Condemned.

God's eye beholds man's inward as well as outward wickedness. None is hid.

God's knowledge of man's inward life:—1. Thorough. 2. Certain. 3. Solemn. 4. Cannot be averted. 5. Cannot be mistaken.

Verse 6. God's fury on account of man's sin:—1. Because man as a sinner does not embody the ideal of moral life which God originally intended to manifest in him. 2. Because man as a sinner does not accomplish the purpose for which he was created. 3. Because man as a sinner is continually debasing his faculties and powers. 4. Because man as a sinner is missing the sublime destiny intended for him.

Sin will always awaken fury within the hearts of men who are in moral sympathy with God.

The fact that the sinner is God's workmanship will not exempt him from destruction.

God will not suffer the earth to give comfort to sinners.

Verse 7. Bitter and utter destruction is determined upon an ungodly world.

The whole creation subject to vengeance for the sin of man.

God's creating goodness is a deep aggravation of the sin of such as rise against Him.

Sin is a destructive influence :—1. Destructive of human life. 2. Destructive of the life of the brute. 3. Destructive of the beauty of the earth. 4. Destructive of the immediate purposes of God.

LONELY MORAL GOODNESS.

Verse 8. We have just had pictured the sad condition of the primitive world; and now in beautiful but lonely contrast we are favoured with the mention of a man whose life was pure and Godly.

I. The Christian man is sometimes solitary in his companionships. It was so with Noah. Though the world was crowded with aged and renowned men, he was alone in it; there were none around whose characters would fit them to be his daily companions. He could not find companionship in the violent men of the age in which he lived. The star of his piety shed a solitary light in the great moral firmament of the times. There were no satellites to join him in his light-giving mission. The darkness was all around him. *His was not fancied loneliness.* At one time Elijah thought himself the only worshipper of the true God, he was ignorant of the thousands who had not bowed the knee unto Baal. God asserts the moral loneliness of Noah, and he could not be deceived in this matter. His eye would only too gladly have beheld another pure life amidst that mass of corruption. *His loneliness was not the result of an exclusive spirit.* He did not of set intention stand aloof from the social life of the world; he did not look down upon ordinary life with sublime contempt as a thing for men of lower spirit to engage in. He was not above the world. He was in the crowded world. He was lonely.

II. The Christian man is sometimes solitary in his character. The world was universally wicked. Noah was the only man who found grace in the eyes of the Lord. He was lonely in his moral goodness. He was animated by different motives, inspired by nobler ambitions, and engaged in grander pursuits than those by whom he was daily surrounded. He was calm and pure amidst the passion of the age. He was the real king of the age. His sceptre was his holy life. Heaven acknowledged him to be such. These royal spirits are generally lonely in this world. They will not be so in the next. There they will have congenial companionships. The sublime experiences of moral goodness must make a man more or less lonely in his inner life.

III. The Christian man is sometimes solitary in his work. Noah was lonely in his work. He had to build an ark. He was a lonely Christian. He was in the future to be a lonely hero. God gives to Christian men a work to perform, the doing of which may render them lonely, but loneliness is not always solitude, as God is always with the spirit of the lonely good. Sometimes a member of the family circle has a lonely task to accomplish in his home; the teacher in the class; and the minister in the sanctuary. Let us be brave in its execution.

The states and nature of gracious ones stand in opposition to the ungodly world.

It is the grace of God that makes good men what they are.

God's gracious eye singles out souls, whom he delivereth from the world's destruction.

Faith must be the finder of grace with God, and no work nor price of man.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 9—13.

NOAH, OR A GOOD MAN LIVING IN DEGENERATE TIMES.

I. That good men living in degenerate times are not overlooked by God. The degenerate and wicked condition of primitive society was under the eye of God. He saw the moral apostacy of the age, that it was almost universal. Noah was the only glad exception. He was the only just and morally perfect man to be found. God did not overlook him in the multitude. God saw Noah and his efforts to be good. Good men are not lost in the mass to the eye of heaven. The surrounding darkness renders the solitary light the more apparent. So the prevalency of evil makes the purity of moral goodness more remarkable. The gardener may overlook the one gay flower in the midst of the weeds, and may pluck all up together; but not so with our heavenly husbandman, he infallibly separates the good from the bad, so that the former is never destroyed through the uprooting of the latter. A good man in the world is conspicuous to the vision of God. In the most wicked ages of the world's history there has generally been one good man left as a representative of the church, and as a rebuke to the follies of the times, and he has generally been divinely shielded from the perils of his situation, and has been rewarded for his heroic testimony to the right. God remembers Lot in the wicked Sodom. A merciful providence is ever over the good.

II. That good men living in degenerate times are often characterized by signal piety. Noah was not merely a good man, just maintaining a reputation for external morality in these barbarous times, but he was a perfect man. The light of his piety was not dim, but bright and constant. It did not flicker before the rude winds of sin around it. The grace of God kept it bright and constant in its flame. This grace was sought by Noah. Without it he could not have retained his moral rectitude in such perilous circumstances. And if we search the annals of history we shall find that the darkest ages have been illumined by the lives of the brightest and best saints, as if the wickedness around them was a new stimulus to devotion, and also to a decided testimony for moral purity. How often has a noted place of business, where the worst characters have wrought their daily toil, been favoured with one lonely pattern of piety. Piety at such times is:—(1.) *A contrast.* (2.) *A rebuke.* (3.) *A testimony.* (4.) *A duty.*

III. That good men living in degenerate times are anxious that their family connections may be preserved from moral defilement. Noah begat a family in those degenerate times. The sons here mentioned were not the offspring of a mixed and wicked alliance. It is not unlikely that the purity of the domestic life of Noah may have been to a large extent his safeguard now. A pure home life is a refuge from the sin of the world at large. It is the tower into which a man may run and be safe. And thus by thoughtful and intelligent considerations, by devout prayer, and by parental solicitations, Noah would endeavour to shield his family from the dark sins of the age. This is a parental duty, but it is often utterly neglected, and not unfrequently frustrated by sorry indiscretions. The father who would keep a son from the world's allurements to vice must be wise in his measures, and kind in the application of them. In this task coercion means failure.

IV. That good men living in degenerate times receive the communications of heaven in reference to the destiny of men. "And God said unto Noah, the end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth." There are times when God has need to speak to men. By whom does He speak? Not by the great of the earth, not by the mighty; but by the morally pure. Only a pure heart can vocalise the messages of God to humanity. To such only will the commission be entrusted. God did not give the tidings of threatened destruction to the violent men, to the men of renown, but to Noah, who was just and perfect. To the good are entrusted the purposes of heaven in reference to the future of men. The servants of God know the things which must shortly come to pass. 1. *This is a dignity.* It is a great honour for any man to be selected as God's spokesman to the race, especially was it so in the case of Noah. He was probably despised by men, but God made him the teacher of those who ridiculed him. A Divine honour was thus put upon him and upon his name and family for ever. 2. *This is a discipline.* Honour which comes from God is generally associated with discipline often painful and severe. The visions are generally followed by the thorn in the flesh. Man is in danger of pride, hence exaltation has to be blended with pain. Noah not only was singled out to communicate the message of God to men, but he also had to build an ark for his own safety during the threatened flood. The building of this ark would be a terrible discipline to him. Its successful accomplishment would make him a moral hero. He would have to endure the world's scorn. He would be nearly alone in his task.

LESSONS: 1. *The good man is worth the mention and commendation of God.* 2. *That true piety can survive the darkest ages and live through the most arduous toils.* 3. *That good men know most of the mind of God in reference to the world's future.* 4. *That good men will not be included in the destructions which overtake the wicked.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 9. The piety of Noah:—1. It was characterized by justice. 2. It was characterized by moral perfection. 3. It was characterized by holy communion with God.

Grace will not suffer the church to cease, but continues its being in the accepted ones of God.

Grace makes a record of the state and propagation of the church for the use of future ages.

In one person or family the church may be visibly preserved, from whence it shall grow anew in after times.

Righteousness by faith must qualify the church of God, from the first to the last in the line of it.

Evangelical perfection turns hearts into the commandments of God, and is proper to the church.

In the worst of times true saints strive to be the most perfect toward God.

The Christian's walk:—1. Christ the rule of it. 2. Christ the company of it. 3. Christ the end of it.

Verse 10. Fruitfulness in body is an effect of grace, to continue God's church.

The holiest parent cannot bring forth a holy seed; that is born of grace.

Little and small may be the visible church; father, sons, and wives, but right.

Grace puts the last before the first, and the younger before the elder. Shem is before Japhet.

Verse 11. Apostacy from God and

pollution of worship, is the corruption of men.

Such corruption in God's face is high provocation.

Violent injury to man generally accompanies apostacy from God.

Fulness of such iniquity makes the world ripe for judgment.

The earth is corrupt to-day:—1. In its commerce. 2. In its pleasures. 3. In its literature. 4. In its ambitions.

Verse 12. God must see and mark iniquity done before Him.

God layeth open all the corruption of men which He sees.

Man is a self-corrupter; he pollutes his own way.

The habitation of man is an aggravation of his sin:—1. The earth is beautiful. 2. It is fruitful. 3. It is prophetic.

God's look toward the world:—1. Scrutinizing. 2. Penetrating. 3. Terrifying. 4. Astonishing. 5. The prelude of doom.

Man's way on the earth:—1. Perverse. 2. Contrary to God's law. 3. Contrary to human enjoyment. 4. Characterized by impurity. 5. Attracts the wrath of God.

Verse 13. God talks with good men.

God reveals His wrath before He executes it.

Thus was Noah put in possession of God's thoughts about the scene around him. The effect of the word of God was to lay bare the roots of all that which man's eye might rest upon with complacency and pride. The human heart might swell with pride, and the bosom heave with emotion, as the eye ran down along the brilliant ranks of men of art, men of skill, men of might, and men of renown. The sound of the harp and the organ might send a thrill through the whole soul, while, at the same time, the ground was cultivated, and man's necessities were provided for in such a way as to contradict any thought in reference to approaching judgment. But, oh, these solemn words, "*I will destroy.*" What a heavy gloom they would necessarily cast over the glittering scene! Could not man's genius invent some way of escape? Could not the "mighty man deliver himself by his much strength?" Alas! no: there was *one* way of escape, but it was revealed to faith, not to sight—not to reason—not to imagination [*C.H.M.*]

Divine destruction:—1. Richly deserved. 2. Awfully certain. 3. Penitently averted. 4. Generally neglected.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 14—22.

THE DIVINELY-ACHIEVED SAFETY OF THE GOOD, AND ITS CONNECTION WITH THE LIFE-GIVING AGENCIES OF THE MATERIAL UNIVERSE.

I. That God is never at a loss for a method whereby to achieve the safety of the Good. "Make thee an ark of Gopher wood," verse 14. 1. *We find that the good are often in eminent peril.* This is a fact too obvious to be overlooked or mistaken. It is not in the economy of heaven that moral goodness should avert from men all the perils of daily life and human circumstances. Scripture biography is an exemplification of this truth, and the annals of civilized and Christian nations lend a similar testimony. Good men are often in danger through the persecutions of their ungodly enemies. Daniel. The three Hebrew children. Sometimes royal mandates have been issued for the arrest of the innocent and the pure. But moral goodness is brave in time of peril. It is protected in imminent suffering. While good men are in this world, peril is a condition of their life, as storm is a condition of maritime life on the great ocean. 2. *We find that the good are often in peril through the prevalence of sin in the world around them.* We do not read that Noah was subject to severe persecution, though it is not improbable that he was; but his danger more particularly arose from association with a degenerate community at the time of its threatened destruction. The ancient world was to be destroyed by a flood; and there was danger lest Noah and his family should participate in the destruction. It does sometimes occur in the economy of heaven that the good and evil are apparently punished together, the same wave lands both on eternal and unknown shores. But it is only in appearance, for though the same event happens to both, the moral character of each renders it different in significance and destiny. To the wicked it is a penalty of woe, which will be eternal; while to the good it is a momentary discipline of pain relieved by the grace of God, and which will soon break into the bright and unending joy of heaven. Both characters go into the chamber of peril at the same portal, but they are immediately accompanied by varied companions, and they awake and emerge to widely different experiences and destinies. And thus a wicked and degenerate people may place a good man in extreme circumstances of danger. They are attractive of the divine anger and judgment. 3. *We find that when it is the purpose of God to save the good from peril, He is never at a loss for means whereby to do so.* He does not always allow the good man to be destroyed by the angry waters let loose upon a degenerate world. He will instruct him as to the best method of safety, yes, even to the building of an ark, in which he shall outride the deluge. And thus the elements which shall destroy the wicked, shall bear up his wondrous craft in unthreatened safety. Such are the mysterious purposes of God. He is never at a loss for means to achieve the welfare of His saints. He can accomplish it by a direct agency, as in the case of Daniel, when heaven stopped the mouth of the lion; as in the case of Jonah, when the great fish was made to preserve the prophet's life; or He can teach men how to achieve their safety by their own natural and daily effort. It is generally the divine way to make men construct the ark of their own safety. Heaven will not save from peril an improvident or thoughtless man. He is not worth saving. Heaven saves men who help themselves. As a rule God saves men who are brave and industrious enough to build their own ark.

II. That in the working out of these methods for the safety of the good, the good are desired to render their most effective co-operation.—"And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of," ver. 15. God arranges the plans for the safety of the good, and the Noah to be saved from the deluge has to work them out. God is the architect of the ark, and Noah is the builder. Heaven *teaches* men the method of their own safety. Noah was instructed audibly. Men are now instructed by spiritual influences, silent but distinct. God quietly places in the mind of the good man an *idea* of the way in which his deliverance must be wrought, and he has carefully to work it out into conduct. This idea becomes the inspiration of energetic toil. If men would be saved from the perils of life they must work out the Divine idea in reference to their safety, they must earnestly co-operate with the silent influences of the Holy Spirit, and with the outworkings of Divine Providence in daily life, and then they will attain the truest welfare and safety of which man is capable, a safety environed by the wisdom and power of God. This co-operation:—1. *It involves an utter self-abandonment to the Divine teaching.* Noah was told to build an ark. This to him would seem a great folly. The suggestion would be somewhat repugnant to his reason. He would not be able to understand the command, nor indeed the great necessity for its execution. But he had faith in God, and this was the animating principle of his conduct. And those who wish to be safe amidst the future perils of being must go and do likewise. They must listen to the Divine teaching. They must believe God. They must rely upon His word without hesitation. They must give themselves up to the Divine inspiration. God inspires men to build an ark, as well as to write a book. It is in yielding to such an impulse, and in acting on such a principle, that the rude carpenter becomes a saintly hero, preserved of God from an otherwise universal danger. 2. *It involves self-sacrifice.* Men who are to be saved from the impending dangers of the world are not exempt from hardship. The ark is not built by some unknown hand, and gently floated on some favourable tide to the door of Noah's house so that he and his family have nothing to do but to take possession of it. He who would dwell in the ark during the storm must build it. This involves much anxiety. All other enterprise has to be suspended; this heaven-given task demands an undivided attention and energy. The cost of such a building would be immense. The undertaking would not be popular, and men would require high wages for their help. Hence we can imagine that it would necessitate great self-sacrifice on the part of Noah in order to its completion. But his salvation from the deluge was ample repayment for all his effort and self-denial. So men who would be saved from the world's impending doom must be willing to sacrifice their all for Christ, and when the waters rage He will be their refuge. 3. *It involves much ridicule.* The man who builds an ark against the coming deluge will always be ridiculed by those who have no insight into the moral history of the future. Some men are too wicked, and others are too thoughtless to inquire into the significance of future events; they think only of the passion of the passing moment and not of the solemnities of the eternal ages. These will not understand the earnest labours of the good to avert impending danger, and consequently will often regard them with contempt. Their ridicule will soon have to cease its mockery in the cry for help. Hence we see that the safety of the good in times of peril and retribution requires their own effort, in harmony with Divine plans, and that it shall be self-sacrificing and brave.

III. That in the working out of these methods for the safety of the good the Divine Providence connects them with the temporal needs of the future. "And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female" (verses 19—22). 1. *The perils which overtake the wicked are not yet intended to put an end to the existing order of the universe.* The deluge which was predicted to come upon those ancient sinners, was not intended to terminate the affairs of the universe, to make an end of all its material splendour, or to permanently interrupt the usual course of things. The race was to be drowned. The brute world was to share in the ruin. But the earth itself was to survive the deluge. Hence it was necessary that provision should be made for its re-population, both with man and beast. And so it is now, the sinner is destroyed and sent to his own place, but the material world survives his fall. But this will not always be so, as one day the elements will melt with fervent heat, and will pass away as a shrivelled parchment. 2. *Then the existing order of things after the flood must be restored by natural and ordinary methods.* The old world empty is not to be re-furnished by miracle, or by the immediate voice of God, as in the first instance. It is to be replenished by the ordinary method of life, which is by generation. It is not the purpose of heaven to recover the devastation occasioned by sin by miraculous agency. Sin makes a havoc which takes long ages to repair. It will soon empty a large world. Piety makes the desolate world fruitful. The life-giving agencies of the future are given by God into the care of the good man; their continuance is connected with his safety, and they are to go forth from his refuge to replace the devastation occasioned by moral evil. 3. *Thus we see that the safety of the good is inseparably joined and associated with the continuance and welfare of the universe at large.* The good are not saved from the perils of the world for the mere preservation of their own lives, not for the mere purposes of religion, but for the preservation of the life-giving agencies of the world at large. A good man casts his mantle of protection over the commercial, social, and material interests of the universe. The lives of the good are linked by God to the continued welfare of humanity. LESSONS: 1. *Let a remembrance of God's care for the good inspire comfort within the hearts of those in perilous circumstances.* 2. *That good men should be thoughtful and devout in their co-operation with the Spirit and Providence of God.* 3. *That by such co-operation men enhance the temporal interests of the world.*

THE ARK, A TYPE OF THE SCHEME OF HUMAN SALVATION.

I. That like the Ark, the scheme of Human Salvation was wrought out after a Divinely-given plan and method. "And God said unto Noah, make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of." (Ver. 13—15.) 1. *Like the Ark, the scheme of Salvation was not conceived by any human mind.* It was utterly impossible that any human being in the ancient world could have conceived the idea of building an ark for the purpose of outriding the angry waters of the deluge. It could not have originated in the mind of Noah, as he would not have anticipated the impending doom but for the Divine announcement. And as for the men of the times, they were totally ignorant of, and were equally unconcerned about, the threats and purposes of heaven. But even when the world became conscious of its imperilled future, it would be thoroughly unable to devise any method of safety. It would be altogether impotent in the sad emergency. And in this respect, the ancient world is but a type of what would be the woful condition of fallen and sinful humanity, but for the aid of heaven. Man knows that he is a sinner, by the revelation of God. He has broken the original law of his being. He has lost his primitive innocence. And, through the operation of many causes, he has become altogether degenerate. His mental life is impure. His social relationships are unhallowed. He is the creature of violent passion. How then can he conceive any method of salvation from the judgment to which his wickedness has rendered him liable? Probably he has no disposition to contemplate the future of his being. And if he has, and is anxious to know how its penalty may be averted, of himself he will be unable to answer his anxieties. He does not know the relation in which he stands to God. He is ignorant of the complete meaning of sin. He possesses none of the factors necessary to determine the probable issues of the present condition of things, and has not sufficient insight into the purposes of God, or energy, to plan a method of safety from a peril so astounding. Sin destroys the true energies of the mind. In the secular sphere of life, man is capable of sublime invention; he can solve the most difficult problems, and conquer the most dire emergencies. His genius in this respect is at the basis of the civilization of nations. Its discoveries are of vast worth to humanity. They are rich in mental energy. They embody patient labour. They are helpful in commerce. They increase our comfort. They enhance our national prowess. They are the pride of our philosophy and learning. They augment our national fame. And in view of these things we cannot but applaud the inventive genius of man. But when we enter the moral sphere of life, when we leave man as a genius and a scholar, and approach him as a sinner, we find him utterly destitute of any idea as to what will constitute his future safety from the wrath of God. He who can make a steam-engine cannot make an ark; he who can paint a picture to be the admiration of the ages, cannot outline the method of his own salvation in the coming danger. Yes! man is better able to solve the problems, and to ascertain the relations of the material universe than of the moral. He knows more about the fires of earth, and how to escape their injury, than how to avert the lightnings of God's wrath He has greater facilities for comprehending and taming the destructive forces around him than he has for those above him. He has a wider knowledge of their relations. He can make a nearer approach to their secrets. He has previous calculations and experiments to aid his inquiries. He has instruments with which to perform his operations. Whereas in reference to the retributive agencies of the future, man, without a Divine revelation, knows not their relation to himself, he cannot penetrate their mystery, he is unable to ascertain their destiny; he is alone in the investigation of them, no previous thinkers can yield him aid; he has no method whereby to calculate their result, and certainly cannot avert their terrible consequence. Man cannot grapple with the awful problem of his sin, and its bearing on the future penalties. It is a certain fact, that man apart from God, however gifted, cannot originate the idea of an ark, or of any method of salvation from the consequences of his guilt. Here he is in an eternal perplexity. How pitiful his condition. For, as Noah and his family would have inevitably perished in the deluge had not God told them how to accomplish their safety, so, had not heaven given to men a scheme of salvation, they must have endured the consequences of their degeneracy. 2. *Like the Ark, the scheme of Salvation was originated by God, and was the outworking of a Divine plan.* The idea of building an ark was implanted in the mind of Noah by God. And the manner in which it was to be wrought out was communicated to him in varied and complete detail. Thus Noah did not build the ark after his own imagination, nor according to the dictate of his own reason, but from a pattern showed him by Jehovah. And so with the scheme of human salvation. As we have seen man had no idea as to how to avert the calamity consequent upon his sin. But God, by His written word, announced the advent of Jesus Christ as the world's Saviour. Thus came to man the first merciful idea of salvation from the retribution of moral evil. Nor was the sending of Jesus Christ into the world to save sinners the outcome of a mere idea in the Divine mind, but of a well-defined plan. And we can trace this plan all through the ages; first in dim outline, and then in sublime completion. The promise merges into prophecy, the prophecy into history; and the seed of the woman is seen in the incarnate Christ. Thus the scheme of salvation was not an accidental thought in the mind of Jehovah. It was a pre-conceived plan. Hence it was in beautiful harmony with all the works of God. The material universe was in idea before it was spoken into permanent form; the sun, moon and stars were arranged in thought before they were sent on their light-giving mission. Throughout the world we have evidence of plan. There is nothing accidental in it. There is nothing random in it. Not one single flower is out of place, even though it bloom upon a desert. And so in the scheme of salvation, there is evidence of design throughout. The priest at the sacrificial altar, and every incident in the life of Christ, was pre-arranged. This plan is the outcome of a Divine intelligence. It displayed a heavenly wisdom. It conveys unfailing comfort to the human soul. It makes men feel that their salvation was intentional, and enables them to place reliance on all its detail.

II. Like the ark, the scheme of human salvation was antecedently very unlikely and improbable for the purpose. If Noah, or any other individual in the ancient world had been informed that it was the purpose of God to save them from the deluge, they would not have imagined that he would have employed such a method. They would not have conceived that he would have saved them in such a manner. They might have thought that He would conceal them in some happy nook where the fury of the angry billows should not reach; or that He would convey them to some distant spot hitherto unknown, where they might dwell in safety till the storm was spent. Such would probably have been the imaginings of the human mind. But as for constructing a rude ark in which to reside during the storm, such an idea would have been the last to have gained their consent. And so, in reference to the scheme of human salvation, it is almost the last that man would have anticipated. That God should send forth His own son into the world, to be incarnate, to die, and to rise again, for the sins of man, was antecedently the most unlikely method of securing our safety that could have been selected. So weak is the human mind to conceive the purposes of God. 1. *Some of the ancient world would no doubt say that the ark was wanting in artistic beauty; and have not men said the same in reference to the scheme of human salvation?* Look at the ark finished as it stands up yonder the pride and astonishment of Noah, its proportions unequal, its dimensions extravagant, and its materials altogether void of beauty as of polish. It was the building of a rude workman. And as such, it would invite the scorn and ridicule of the people of the age. And men have denounced the scheme of salvation as utterly destitute of moral loveliness. They point to its varied parts, the sacrifices of the ancient times, the bitter sufferings, and painful death of Christ, and ask if such can be accepted as a plan of beauty. But such men are mistaken in their ideas of beauty, as were the people of Noah's day. The beauty of the ark was not in its timbers, but in its merciful design. And so the moral loveliness of the scheme of man's salvation, was not so much in the historic circumstances by which it was accompanied, as in the holy and divine purpose contemplated therein. In the death of a supposed impostor, there was humanly speaking nothing to be desired, there was to the human eye no pencilling of light and glory, but in the pardon it secures, in the moral purity it renders possible, and in the heaven it provides, there is a wealth of beauty beyond compare. Thus like the ark, the cross was unsightly to the outward eye, while to the inner vision of the believing soul it was bright with immortal glories. Only the few are true judges of the morally beautiful. There is no beauty equal to the rose of Sharon. There is none that has been more despised. 2. *Some of the ancient world would no doubt say that the Ark would be unable to accomplish its purpose; and have not men said the same in reference to the scheme of human Salvation?* Many people who came to view the Ark, would predict its utter failure in the time of severe trial, which would be occasioned by the angry deluge. They would say that such a huge mass of timber would not float upon the sweeping waters; that Noah would not be able to control its movements, or direct its course; in short that it would soon expose the pious man to the flood he hoped to escape. But they were false and ignorant prophets, who knew not that the secret of the Lord was with them that fear him. Men have uttered the same prediction in reference to the scheme of human salvation. They have said that it would not answer its contemplated purpose. They have found fault with it as a moral structure. They say that it has not sufficient regard for all the exigencies of the case, and that when the times of retribution come it will be a wreck. This is the prediction of infidelity. It is uttered without sufficient warrant. It is destined to disappointment. No storm can reach the soul that has taken refuge in Christ. He is competent to carry it to the eternal haven of peace. He has shielded thousands from the retributions of Divine anger. 3. *Some of the ancient world would no doubt come to criticise the ark; and have not men done the same in reference to the scheme of human salvation?* This is implied in what we have already stated; the artist would criticise its beauty; the mechanic of the day would inspect its structure and material; the scientists of the age would regard it in relation to the elements; and the philosopher would view it as the outcome of frenzy. And no doubt each would view it from his own peculiar standpoint; and many would imagine that they could have built a better thing themselves if there were any need for it. And is not all this typical of the amount and kind of criticism which has attacked the scheme of human salvation? The man of intellectual predilictions has criticised and even written books in reference to it. He cannot understand it, and is it any wonder? Could any person understand the ark of Noah without going inside it? Nor can men, however philosophical they may be, comprehend the scheme of man's salvation unless they have practical and personal experience of it. This is the only remedy for a hostile criticism of the cross. Noah did not criticise the ark; he was saved by it. Men of emotional and fearful natures have approached the scheme of salvation, and anxiously inquired as to its worth. They are timid. They fear it will fail them in the hour of trial. And many imagine that they can save themselves from the impending doom without it. They are mistaken. Many never criticise the ark. They are thoughtless. They neglect it altogether. A sceptical and merely critical spirit is the worst which a man can bring to the sacred inspection of the scheme of salvation.

III. That as the ark had a window, so the scheme of human salvation is illumined by the light of God. The ark was not in total darkness, but was illumined by a window, the plan of which was Divinely given. The light thus brought into the ark would be very necessary to industry, comfort, and life. Otherwise all within would have been in much the same sad condition as the multitudes without. In fact it would have been no refuge to Noah and his family. 1. *The scheme of human salvation is illumined by the Holy Spirit.* As the rays of the natural light streamed in through the window of the ark, and discovered all its compartments to Noah: so the light of the Divine Spirit of God shines into the wondrous scheme of man's redemption. This light discloses the meaning of salvation, the great and universal need of it, and also the awful retribution which it averts. Thus men can only see all the inner departments of the great scheme of salvation when they walk in the light of the Holy Spirit of God. Then they see its construction, they perceive its intention, and can admire the great wisdom displayed in its every department. The folly of man is that he tries to see the scheme of salvation by the aid of a light which he himself possesses. He seeks not the light from on high. What would have been the folly and danger of Noah had he rejected the light of heaven, and substituted a tinder and flint of his own for it? He would not have seen the ark to perfection, he would not have been acquainted with it, in fact half his time he would have been in darkness. Yet this is the course men are constantly pursuing in reference to the scheme of human salvation. They use their own feeble lights in the investigation of it, in preference to the eternal light of God, and is it any wonder that they get imperfect conceptions of it? If a man would see God's truth, he must use the light which comes in at the God-given window. That light is the purest and the best. The light of mere intellect is feeble compared with it. Thus by walking in the light of God shall we see in the scheme of salvation its moral beauty, its fitness for the end contemplated, and its exhibition of the manifold wisdom of heaven. 2. *This illumination of the scheme of salvation is the abiding comfort and joy of man.* There are and ever will be mysteries in the scheme of human salvation which no created intelligence will be able to fathom, or comprehend. There were compartments in the ark where the light was almost darkness, and where the eye of man would be almost useless. But into these there is little need that Noah should go. All the broad places of the ark are well lighted. So the plan of redemption is illumined by the Holy Spirit in all its departments where human intelligence is required to toil. All is revealed that it is necessary for man to know. And this is the comfort of the human heart. It is the joy of the human soul. We ought indeed to be grateful that the great centre truth of doctrine is thus so well illumined by the good Spirit of God.

IV. That as the ark had a door, so into the scheme of human salvation there is but one method of entrance. 1. *That like the ark the scheme of salvation has an entrance.* The ark was not built without a door, if it had been it would have been useless, Noah could not have entered. Neither was the scheme of salvation completed by Jesus Christ and then left without the possibility of human entrance. This would have been a mockery of human hope. Christ is the way to eternal safety. 2. *That like the ark, the scheme of salvation has but one entrance.* There was only one door in the ark, and that was at the side. Noah was commanded to make it. And so in reference to the scheme of human salvation, there is but one mode of entrance, and that is by Jesus Christ, and no man can come unto the Father but by Him. And this one way is sufficient to admit all comers. None have to wait for admission because the door is crowded, and will not admit the multitudes who are anxious to get in. If the door is solitary, it is wide, and easily accessible. Men may attempt to make new doors into the ark of salvation, but they cannot. They can only enter by the appointed one. There is no other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus.

V. That like the ark, the scheme of human salvation is efficient to the accomplishment of the designed purpose. The ark was efficient to the salvation of Noah and his family from the terrible deluge; and so the scheme of salvation wrought out by Jesus Christ is, and will be, efficient to the redemption of men from the guilt and retribution of sin into the eternal joy of heaven. And as Noah was landed almost upon a new world, so the redeemed sinner shall enter upon the possession of the sinless world, not made desolate by a flood, but enriched with all the fulness and glory of God.

VI. That like the ark, the scheme of human salvation is neglected by the vast multitude. The myriads of the old world perished in the angry deluge; the exploit and glory of the age, all perished in this watery grave. Only Noah and his family were saved. The men of the age were without excuse in their destruction. They had been warned of the penalty of their sin. The facts of the case were made known to them by Noah. They paid him no heed. And so it is to-day. The sins of men are waiting the retributions of God. The judgment is in the future. The ministers of Christ proclaim it near. The world apparently believes them not, but continues in its degenerate course of life. Its passion will only be subdued by the woe of the actual calamity. Then it will see its folly, when too late! LESSONS:—1. *That a Divine method of salvation is provided for the human race from the future retributions of the universe.* 2. *That this salvation is equal to all the need of the case.* 3. *That men who neglect or despise it are sure to perish.* 4. *The holy wisdom of entering the ark at once.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

THE PREACHING OF THE ARK.

Verse 14. The ark stands out in the dim scene of the remote past, an object of the deepest interest. As we gaze on its huge bulk, now floating on the dark waters, then resting in majestic repose on the heights of Ararat in the sunshine of the renovated world, it seems to us to be replete with instruction. It is at once a *memorial* of Divine goodness and *a testimony* to the strength of human faith. It appears both as a symbol of Divine mercy, and as *a beacon* of Divine wrath. **Let us review it in these various phases.**

I. A memorial of Divine goodness. 1. *It reminds us of His saints.* Amongst the thousands of the world, Noah stood alone, firm in faith, dauntless in courage; God does not forget him; the innocent shall not suffer with the guilty. "God waited . . . while the ark was a preparing." 1 Pet. iii. 20. *It reminds us of His regard for the families of His* saints. It may be some of the members of Noah's family did not participate in their father's faith, yet all were saved. It is a universal fact that God specially blesses the children of His servants. They may not be among the saved at last, but they have enjoyed more privileges, heard more warnings, received more entreaties than others.

3. *It reminds us of God's goodness to the world.*

All are invited to enter the ark. None who sought admission would be refused.

II. A testimony to Noah's faith. Heb. xi. 7. 1. *It was on account of Noah's faith the ark was devised.* 2. *Faith built and furnished it.* 3. *By faith Noah entered.* 4. *Faith sustained him there.*

III. A symbol of the Saviour. 1. *The ark was a refuge.* "*Thou* art my hiding place." Psalm xxvii. 7. 2. *The ark was a home.* "Lord, thou hast been our *home* in all generations." Psalm xc. 1. 3. *The ark was a temple.* There Noah and his family worshipped. We must be in Christ if we would be acceptable worshippers. John, the divine, speaks of the Lord after this fashion, "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the *temple* of it." Rev. xxi. 22..

4. *The ark was a conveyance.* So to speak, it bore Noah from the old to the new world; from the valley of his labours and sorrows to the mountain of rest and plenty. "I am the way," said Jesus.

IV. A beacon for the sinner. The ark warns sinners of their danger. It points out the awful nature of unbelief, of voluptuousness, of pride. It warns us that, though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." That numbers cannot shield us from divine wrath. The crime of the antediluvians was none the less terrible, because universally fashionable! 1. *The ark proclaims the wilfulness of sinners.* Who built it? Were not many of its builders destroyed? We may be the means of insuring safety for others, and be ourselves lost. 1 Cor. ix. 27. 1. *The ark warns us of the power of sin.* How long was it building? Month after month it was surveyed by hundreds, still they continued in sin. Beware of the deceitfulness of sin. *Appl.* Listen to the strange and varied story this silent ark so eloquently tells. Hear its attestation of the goodness and faithfulness of God; hear, too, its awful revelation of His power to punish and destroy.—[*Stems and Twigs.*]

In pouring out indignation on the wicked world, God provideth for his saints.

God alone knoweth how to deliver the just from destruction to come.

However, God alone saveth, yet it is by means.

Men must use God's means in order to salvation according to his prescript.

In God's command of using means, there is implied a promise. As to make the ark.

Means of salvation to sight are but mean and despicable, a little timber and pitch.

Verse 15, 16. All church-work for salvation must have its line and measure from God.

Sufficient dimensions doth God give to the means of salvation for his people.

Light must be in the means or instrument of man's salvation.

A due proportion of place is designed by God for all creatures admitted into the church ark for salvation.

Verse 17. It was an appalling announcement; how solemn and how stern; "I, even I,"—the repetition has in it an awful emphasis and force —"I, even I." It is the Lord who speaks, the Creator, the Preserver, now coming forth in wrath as the Destroyer.—(*Dr. Candlish*).

It is an assurance that He will execute His decree, not merely on account of what He has said to His creatures, but also on account of what He is in Himself—that His very nature requires the thing to be done.—(*Dr. Candlish*).

God, even God himself, will testify against the unbelief of the wicked, and will encourage faith in His own.

God not only threatens, but executes vengeance on the wicked.

Rare and unheard of judgments hath God in store for unbelievers.

All creatures are at God's commands to work His vengeance.

Vengeance spreads in the earth, as far as wickedness.

Corruption of sin in man brings destruction upon the life of all flesh that serves him.

God has His time to rid sinners from under heaven.

Universal sin brings universal death.

Abused mercy turns into fury [*Trapp*].

A dismal doom; and God is now

absolute in His threatening, because He will be *resolute* in His execution [*Trapp*]

Verse 18. Special grace exempts from general desolation.

God's covenant only conveys His grace for salvation.

God makes His covenant to special persons.

God makes His covenant of grace stable to His covenanted ones.

The covenant of grace carries a common salvation in it.

The whole family sometimes fares the better for a gracious saint.

Wicked men may have the mercies of God's covenant, and never yet be in it.

Salvation:—1. Given to man. 2. Extended to brutes. 3. Not by chance.

The covenant with Noah. Here is the first appearance of a covenant between God and man on the face of Scripture. A covenant is a solemn compact, tacit or express, between two parties, in which each is bound to perform his part. Hence a covenant implies the moral faculty; and wherever the moral faculty exists, there must needs be a covenant. Consequently, between God and man there was of necessity a covenant from the very beginning, though the name do not appear. At first it was a covenant of works, in regard to man; but now that works have failed, it can only be a covenant of grace to the penitent sinner. *My covenant.* The word *my* points to its original establishment with Adam. My primeval covenant, which I am resolved not to abandon. *Will I establish.* Though Adam has failed, yet will I find means of maintaining my covenant of life with the seed of the woman. *With thee.* Though all flesh be to perish through breach of my covenant, yet will I uphold it with thee. [*Dr. Murphy.*]

Thou and thy sons. Yet Ham soon after degenerated: for the present he concealed his wickedness from men; from God he could not. He bears with hypocrites in his visible church for a season, till the time of separation [*Trapp.*]

Verses 19, 20. Providence determineth to continue the world by propagation with male and female.

The highest providence useth man's care in saving creatures.

An instinct doth God give to creatures whom He will save, to come to the means of their salvation.

Life of all kinds in heaven and earth is the work of God and issue of his counsels.

If more questions be asked as to how untamed and savage animals could be got to live harmoniously and quietly together, let one consideration be remembered. The same Lord who will hereafter make the wolf dwell with the lamb and the leopard lie down with the kid, when the earth shall be as full of the knowledge of the Lord, as it then was full of the waters covering the sea—that same Lord who designed the ark floating on the flood to be the very type and emblem of that holy mountain of his, in all which they shall not hurt nor destroy—He could with equal ease both move the creatures to enter in at Noah's command, and constrain them for a brief season to resume the peaceful nature which they had in Paradise, before this creation began to groan for the sin of man—the nature which—are they not to have again when creation is delivered and Paradise restored. (Isaiah xi. 6—9; Rom. viii. 19—22. [*Dr. Candlish.*]

Verses 21, 22. Life God maintains by food convenient, and therefore commands providence to men to get meat for themselves and beasts.

True faith in God giveth obedience to him.

God's command alone is the rule of faith's obedience.

Faith giveth full and thorough returns to all that God enjoineth.

God could have kept them alive without either food or ark. But He will have us serve His providence, in use of lawful means; and so to trust

Him, as that we do not tempt Him. [*Trapp.*]

NOAH'S OBEDIENCE.

The deluge the greatest demonstration of God's hatred of sin, with the exception of the Cross. One favoured servant was exempted from the retribution—Noah.

I. **The obedience rendered by Him.** It is not easy to form a just estimate of this. *The circumstances in which he was placed.* He was appointed a preacher of righteousness, and had to predict the deluge. Thus for 120 years; without sign of its approach. The delay would be almost fatal to the message. *The means he was directed to use for the preservation of God's chosen remnant.* The ark. Expense and labour of it. Ridicule; almost beyond endurance. *His perseverance in the use of these means till he had completed the work assigned him.* Nothing could induce him to desist from his work till it was perfected in every part. This obedience was of the most exalted character. It shows how firmly he believed the Divine testimony, how he stood in awe of God, and how determined he was to avail himself of the means of safety offered. In accordance with this is

II. **The obedience required of us.** 1. *The danger to which we are exposed is similar.* God has declared that He will call the world to judgment. We see no preparation for it. Multitudes laugh at it. The wrath of God will fall on them. 2. *The means provided for our escape are similar.* God has provided an ark for us—His own Son—into which all who believe shall enter; but which will be closed against an unbelieving world. Many think this absurd. They prefer the ark of their own good works. 3. *The distinction that will be made between the believing and unbelieving world will be similar.* Learn from the whole:—1. *The office of faith.* Not to argue, but to believe God. We are not to ask how we can be punished in hell, or how faith in Christ can save us. We are to credit the Divine testimony. 2. *The necessity of fear.* If we believe God's threats against sinners, how can we but fear? 3. *The benefit of obedience.* Noah above the waves in perfect safety [*Simeon's Appendix*].

The ark a type of the church:—1. As Noah built the ark, so Christ, by prophets, apostles, etc., built the church. 2. As the ark is made of the most durable wood, so the church endureth constantly against all adversaries. 3. As pitch was used about the ark to join the parts together, so by ardent love the members of the church are united. 4. As the ark was pitched inside and out, so the faithful have not only good works externally, but holiness within. 5. As the ark was more long than broad, and more broad than high, so the church is of greater extent in its faith, which is longitude, than in its charity, which is latitude, and yet in its love of greater extent than in its heavenly contemplation, which is altitude. 6. As the ark was distinguished by rooms and stories, some higher and some less, so in the church there is great diversity of members, attainments, and social standing. 7. Like the ark, there is but one door into the church; and truth is the only light of the church. 8. All sorts of creatures came into the ark, both clean and unclean, so all sorts, both good and bad, are in the church. 9. As the clean creatures came in by sevens, so the godly in the church are united together in greater numbers. 10. As in the ark there was food for all kinds of creatures, so in the church there is a variety of food for the soul.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VI.

BY THE

REV. WM. ADAMSON.

Moral Declension! Ver. 1. As there is a law of continuity, whereby in ascending we can only mount step by step; so they who descend must sink with an ever-increasing velocity. No propagation is more rapid than that of evil; no growth more certain. He who is in for a penny, if he does not resolutely fly, will find that he is in for a pound. The longer the avalanche rolls down the glacier slopes, the swifter becomes its speed. A little group of Alpine travellers saw a flower blooming on the slope of the cliff on which they stood surveying the prospect below. Each started to secure the prize; but as they hastened down, the force of their momentum increased with each step of the descent—they were borne on the smooth icy surface swiftly past the object of pursuit—and were precipitated into a yawning crevasse. Such is the declension of the soul, until it passes

> "Down into the eternal dark;
> Yet not for rest, nor sleep."—*Bonar.*

Sin-Proneness! Ver. 1. The most lovely infant that is ushered into being has within it by nature the germs of those elements which feed the flames of hell, and leaven its forlorn inmates with their direst misery. It has in its own heart—to borrow the language of Canning—the embryo of that Upas-tree, which distils upon humanity on earth and on humanity in hell its death-drops; and so living are the seeds—so congenial is the soil that, unless overborne by the grace of the Holy Spirit and the appliances of the Gospel, they will inevitably spring up and flourish

"Till the whole soul it comprehends,
And all its powers overclouds
With condemnation's thunder-shrouds."
—*Oriental.*

Evil Association! Ver. 2. The sons of God could not associate with the godless world without suffering morally. Sophronius, a wise teacher, would not suffer even his grown up sons and daughters to associate with those whose conduct was not pure and upright. His daughter remarked that he must think them very childish to imagine that they would yield to evil when with such companions. The wise parent took a dead coal from the hearth, and placed it in his daughter's hand, saying: "Do not fear, it will not burn you." Yet, though it did not scorch, it smirched—not only hands, but dress. When Eulalia vexatiously expressed her objection to such close contact with coal, her father quietly remarked that evil company was like coal; it might not burn, but it would blacken. The company of the vicious daughters of the ungodly soils the purity of the "children of God":—

"A thousand evil thoughts intrude
Tumultuous in the breast."—*Newton.*

Conviction! Ver 3. In times, says Arnot, when vile men held the high places of the land, a roll of drums was employed to drown the martyr's voice, lest the testimony of truth from the scaffold should reach the ears of the people. So do men deal with their own consciences and seek to put to silence the truth-telling voice of the Holy Spirit. But My Spirit shall not always strive with man. Thus obstinately resisted, He will withdraw, for

"Though the Holy Spirit deigns to dwell
In earthly domes, 'tis not those defiled
With pride—with fraud—with rapine, or with lust."—*Jenner.*

Omniscience! Ver 5. The thoughts that issue from the home of the human heart—bold like robbers in the dark—overleap the fences of holiness, suck at will every flower they reckon sweet, and return to deposit their gatherings in the owner's cup. But as a spectator watches the movements of a hive of bees, so the eye of the Lord sees ALL. Thought chases thought with lightning rapidity; still His eye sees ALL—sees that each is only evil without mitigation—that every germ of idea, every incipient embryo of conception, every inclination is only evil.

"Almighty God! Thy piercing eye
Strikes through the shades of night;
And our most secret actions lie
All open to Thy sight."—*Watts.*

Sons of God! Ver. 2. Some were born again—and thus a new creation made them sons of God. The Holy Spirit—descending on the wings of love, and moving in the almightiness of His strength—implanted new being in the heirs of life. Death can never generate life—skeletons cannot arise—dry leaves cannot bloom—extinct ashes cannot brighten into flame; only Omnipotence can turn the serfs of sin into the sons of God.

"Spirit of purity and grace,
Our weakness see;
O make our hearts Thy dwelling-place,
And worthier Thee."—*Auber.*

Holy Spirit! Ver. 3. We sometimes see in ancient mansions that portion once devoted to divine service laid in ruins, while that which was designed for the good cheer of men is whole and in complete repair. The soul is in a state of miserable decay and dilapidation, but the hall of entertainment—*i.e.*, the body—is sound and furnished well. The principles and affections that belong to the lowest range and sphere of our being remain; but the spirit which alone can consecrate and sanctify them is gone. Here it is that the Spirit of God steps in to strive with man—to awaken him to a sense of self-ruin—to arouse in him the desire for self-restoration—and to accomplish that miraculous restitution of all good things in the moral ruin of the sanctuary of the human soul.

"The Spirit of God
From heaven descending, dwells in domes of clay;
In mode far passing human thought, He guides,
Impels, instructs."—*Hay.*

Obduracy! Ver. 3. Had the antediluvians no outward warning? They had Noah, the preacher of righteousness. Had they no inward check? They had the Holy Spirit. Scripture is not silent, though the mystery is deep. The Spirit strove for a while, and ceased. He approached, and then withdrew. He came again; but admission was denied Him. His visits became more rare, and then they discontinued altogether. The knocks remained without answer, and ultimately died away. The inward stillness was no more disturbed. The souls slept on, and dreamed into perdition. Each morning in winter, the man breaks the ice forming on the lake, and though repeated frosts follow, the lake is not frozen over. But suffer the ice to form day by day, and little by little, the thickness increases, until thousands may stand with hammers, and strike in vain. These souls had drifted into frozen realms, where no gospel ray shone to thaw the ice upon them.

A blotting night of horror deep,
"That knows no dawn, and knows no sleep."
—*Alger.*

Sin-Issue! Ver. 5. A mountain stream—whose pure and salubrious waters are continually polluted by the daily washing and cleansing of poisonous minerals—is a just emblem of the flesh. Its desires, imaginations, and affections—once pure and holy—are now like a corrupt and troubled spring, which is always emitting impure water. Salter says that the evil nature of fallen creatures is ever bursting out into bad and pernicious motions and lusts.

"Till custom takes away the judging sense,
That to offend, we think it no offence."
—*Smith.*

Sin! Ver. 6. Man is prone to sin. He is like an idle swimmer, that goes carelessly floating down the stream rather than exert himself to swim against the current, and gain the bank. He must reach the sea at last; and when he hears the breakers, and sees the foaming crests of the waves, he becomes alarmed. But it is TOO LATE. The stream is now too strong for him—his limbs are benumbed and enervated from want of exertion, and, unfitted and unprepared, he is hurled into the ocean of eternity.

"Delay not! Delay not! the Spirit of grace,
Long-grieved and resisted, may take His sad flight;
And leave thee in darkness to finish thy race,
And sink in the vale of eternity's night."
—*Hastings.*

Sin Growth! Ver. 8. Dr. Boyd says: "I do not know why it is that—by the constitution of the universe evil has so much more power than good to produce its effect, and to propagate its nature. One drop of foul will pollute a whole cup of fair water; but one drop of pure water has no power to appreciably improve a cup of impure water. The sons of men were more numerous than the sons of God, and very soon corrupted them; and Noah, who stood alone was unable to any appreciable degree to influence for good the abounding evil men:—

"Men with men wrought wickedness—till crime and craft
Became to them what virtue once had been,
Their joy, their nature—their essential life."

Divine Grace! Ver. 9. The light of Noah's piety was not dim, because the Holy Spirit influenced him. What difference can be detected between two needles, one of which has received an electric shock, whilst the other has not? None until the occasion arises! and yet the one has hidden virtues, of which the other has none. The electric shock has rendered the one needle a magnet, which, duly balanced, will enable man to find his way across the trackless ocean. Noah had received the Holy Spirit, and his pious example—like the needle—pointed the wanderers in sin to God's mercy. But they shut their eyes to the pattern:—

"Which shone, a star amid the storm,
The harbinger of REST."—*Latrobe.*

Preaching! Ver. 11. Like Enoch, Elijah and John the Baptist, Noah urged his neighbours to flee from the coming wrath. But they would not hear. If aroused for a moment from the sleep of sinful self-sufficiency, they soon slumbered. "Fire! Fire!" Such was the cry in the middle of the night, which echoed through the quiet streets. A ladder was placed against the wall—up its rungs sprang a brave young man to arouse a friend sleeping in that upper room, where he lay in a drunken sleep. To shake him roughly was the work of an instant. The sleeping man stirred—opened his eyes for a moment—turned on his side and closed his eyes in stupid insensibility, murmuring, "I do not believe it." His would-be deliverer had but just time to drop into the fire-escape to save his own life. Noah preached, but men would not believe that danger and death were near!

"O hasten mercy to implore,
And stay not for the morrow's sun;
For fear thy season should be o'er
Before this evening's stage be run."

Piety! Ver. 9. Standing on the sea-shore on a calm summer morning or evening, the vessels in the far distance appear to be sailing in the sky and not on the sea. So doubtless did Noah appear to these worldling spectators of his age, to be walking in the sky, and not on the earth. He was a marked man, secretly to be admired, but openly to be avoided. They took notice of him that he was unlike themselves, living a life of faith, traversing his spiritual way to the glory of God.

"Saints are indeed our pillar-fires,
Seen as we go;
They are that City's shining spires,
We travel to."—*Vaughan.*

Holy Life! Ver. 9. On one occasion a man made an effort in argument with a friend to disprove the existence of anything like "motion," whereupon his friend sprang up, and paced the ground before him. And not more completely was his sophistry confuted who attempted to disprove the doctrine of motion, by his opponent immediately rising and walking, than Noah put to silence the folly and ignorance of the Antediluvians. By a *walk* holy and close with God he demonstrated to the unbelieving universe of his day that Jehovah's word is true. In some cases, perhaps, evil was checked, but not subdued—enmity was shackled, but not removed—conscience was roused, but not enlightened—convictions were produced, but no conversions followed. Yet who shall say that Noah met not in Paradise some whose hearts were changed ere yet the waters reached the mountain tops!

"O friend! O brother! not in vain
Thy life so pure and true,
The silver dropping of the rain,
The fall of summer dew."—*Whittier.*

The Divine Eye! Ver. 12. Secher tells how Plato has a reference to the fact of the King of Lydia being in possession of a ring with which—when he turned the head to the palm of his hand—he could see every person, and yet he himself remain invisible. Though we cannot see God while we live, yet *He* can see how *we* live; for His eyes are upon the ways of man, and He seeth all his goings—both outward and inward:—

"Under the surface, life in death.
Slimy tangle and oozy moans,
Creeping things with watery breath,
Blackening roots and whitening bones."—
—*Havergal.*

Judgment! Ver. 13. The stroke of judgment is like the lightning flash—irresistible, fatal. It kills—kills in the twinkling of an eye. But the clouds from which it leaps are SLOW to gather. As Guthrie says, they thicken by degrees. The mustering clouds—the deepening gloom—the still and sultry air—the awful silence—the big pattering raindrops, all reveal his danger to the traveller, and warn him to hasten to the nearest shelter. Ahab was busily employed picnicing with his gay court on the grassy slopes of Carmel, and did not see the gathering storm; but the prophet sent him warning to hurry to his ivory palace in the plain of Jezreel. And where is the sinner who goes down unwarned? An unseen hand often restrains with gentle touch—a voice within often persuasively reminds that ruin follows sin. The annals of the old world prove this. Truth announced that the inevitable end would come, but forbearance checked the final step for 120 years. The long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah:—

"Mustering His wrath, while His anger stayed:
Till full their cup, the Lord of heaven delayed
To pour His vengeance."—*Rolls.*

Deluge-traditions! Ver. 13. Mr. Catlin vouches for the extraordinary fact that, of all the tribes he visited among the Indians of North-West America, there was not one which did not, by some means or other, connect their origin with a "big canoe," which was supposed to have rested on the summit of some hill or mountain in their neighbourhood:—

"High on the summit of this dubious cliff
Deucalion wafting moor'd his little skiff."—
—*Dryden.*

Salvation! Ver. 13. When Noah heard the announcement of the flood of waters possibly the enquiry instantaneously flashed up; what must I do to be saved? As in the case of the anxious soul, so in the case of Noah, it was an enquiry which only God could answer. Just as the child, gathering pebbles on the sea shore, sinks into insignificance when compared with the diver searching for pearls, or the miner excavating for diamonds; so all Noah's previous and present surroundings dwindled into nothingness before this important question: If such an overwhelming, universal deluge was ahead, what was he to do for salvation from it? God answered, as He always does the really sincere, anxious enquirer: I will save thee. Salvation is of the Lord. There is the divinely appointed ark of safety. Faith says:—

"Let earth and hell conspire their worst, their best,
And join their twisted might!
Let showers of thunderbolts dart round and round me,
All this shall ne'er confound me."—*Quarles.*

Divine Salvation! Ver. 14. Some time ago, a man, who had heard a minister of the Gospel preach on the previous sabbath, went to him in a state of mental anxiety to ask him how he could be saved. The venerable man of God said: "The wages of sin is death," whereupon the man exclaimed: "Then I am lost." To this exclamation of bitter anguish, the minister answered that such a conclusion did not follow, because God had found a ransom. "In His infinite love and pity, He devised a plan to save sinners, a plan, which should shew His eternal hatred of sin, while it disclosed the treasures of His compassion for sinners." He then went on to detail the whole scheme of salvation, the Divinely prepared ark of safety in the cleft body of His dear Son of Calvary. The man was delighted and astonished. He exclaimed: "Is it really so? Is there an ark of safety?" The minister at once briefly replied that it was in the Bible. "Then the Bible is from God; *for none but He* could have thought it."

Spritual Vision! Ver. 15. As well may you pour tones of delicious music on the ears of the deaf, or floods of brilliant light on the eyeballs of the blind, expecting to awaken corresponding sympathy in the soul, as that the carnal mind can be convinced of the excellence and beauty of the Ark of Grace. The supreme excellence and perfect harmony which pervade its entire structure without and within, can only be discerned by a spiritual eye, others see no beauty in this ark; though Noah did. He could perceive the beauty of the Divine purpose. He could distinguish the harmony of the Divine plan. And this heart to prize the ark, this mind to investigate its nature, this eye to trace its proportions and beauties came from God.

"Oh! take the heart I could not give,
Without Thy strength-bestowing call;
In Thee, and for Thee, let me live
For I am nothing, Thou art all."

Gospel! Ver. 15. On one occasion in France, a group of Sunday-school children were taken a long distance to see the interior of a cathedral, in which was a stained glass window of exquisite beauty and chasteness. As they drew near, the conductor exclaimed: "There is the window," pointing as he did so to what seemed a dingy sheet scarred with irregular pieces of dull lead. The children were disappointed, and complained of having been brought so far for "only that." But the leader guided them within the precincts of the cathedral pile, when they at once saw all the beauty of design and structure. So the Holy Spirit leads us to the Gospel of Salvation; but we see nothing attractive in it, until He conducts us within its walls. Then the whole flood of beauty bursts upon our entranced spirits; and, like Peter in the Mount of Transfiguration, we are ready to exclaim: "It is good for us to be here!"—

> "Seeing Him in all His beauty,
> Satisfied with Him alone."—*Havergal.*

Blindness! Ver. 16. The mind—divinely illuminated—can penetrate into the vast domain of faith, and discover the glories there revealed. But without the Spirit all is dark—all mysterious. And just what the telescope is to the eye of the astronomer, as when with a glance he sweeps the firmament of nature in search of new and undiscovered worlds, faith is the Spirit of God to man. Man cannot find out God by all his searching; but the Spirit revealeth the deep things of God. The Ark of Christ is equally beyond human comprehension. What beams can its feeble, flickering light cast upon this mystery? But the Spirit must

> "Enable with perpetual light
> The dulness of our blinded sight."
> 1662.—

Gospel-Ark! Ver. 16. What has wrought such moral revolutions in the world? If the devotee of superstition has been converted by it—if it has made the spiritually blind to see—if it has transformed the ravening wolf into the gentle lamb, and the greedy vulture into the soft dove—if it has soothed the deepest anguish of the heart, and calmed the fierce tempest of the soul—if it has sweetened the bitterest calamities of life, and unfurled the banner of victory in the last and latest hour of life—if it has shed upon the Christian's tomb the radiance of a glorious immortality, then it has done what no other schemes have succeeded in doing—then it is the Ark of God, to which we may safely flee. Till another Gospel has been discovered of more grace and goodness—of more power and principle—of more promise and perfection, let us not despise it. Let us make or find a better, safer Ark—not cavil at the Ark which Divine Wisdom has planned and Divine Love has provided:—

> "Not to be thought on, but with tides of joy,
> Not to be mentioned, but with shouts of praise."

Ark! Ver. 14. Christ is the Gospel-Ark. Behold Him! The ark of old was but an emblem of His full redemption. He is the one deliverance from all peril. He is the heaven-high refuge—the all-protecting safety. He is the building of enduring life—the foundation of which was laid in the counsels of eternity—the superstructure of which was reared in the fulness of time on the plains of earth, and the head of which towers above the skies. He is that lofty fabric of shelter which God decreed, appointed, provided, and set before the sons of men; and all the raging storms of vengeance, and all the fury of the waves of wrath only consolidate its strength. Our Ark of Salvation is the Mighty God.

> "Onward then, and fear not,
> Children of the Day!
> For His word shall never,
> Never pass away!"

Activity! Ver. 17. Doubtless the Antediluvians were useful in aiding righteous Noah to construct the ark for the saving of his house, while they themselves perished in the flood—clinging, perchance, to the sides, or clutching the keel of the vessel as it floated serenely on its way. The scaffolding, says one, is useful in the erection of the building; but, constituting no essential part of the structure, it is removed when the edifice is complete. Religious activity is not salvation. Working for Jesus is not necessarily living in Jesus. An individual engaged in religious work may be useful in guiding the steps of others, as the finger-post planted midway between two diverging roads may direct correctly the doubtful steps of the traveller, itself remaining stationary. Noah's neighbours helped him to fulfil God's command—aided him in securing salvation; yet they never kept God's statutes themselves, and never succeeded in escaping from the Deluge.

> "In vain the tallest sons of pride
> Fled from the close pursuing wave."

Flood of Waters! Ver. 17. Mythology tells how Jupiter burned with anger at the wickedness of the iron age. Having summoned a council of the gods, he addressed them—setting forth the awful condition of the things upon the earth, and announcing his determination to destroy all its inhabitants. He took a thunderbolt, and was about to launch it upon the world, to destroy it by fire, when he bethought himself that it might enkindle the heavens also. He then resolved to drown it by making the clouds pour out torrents of rain:—

> "With his clench'd fist
> He squeezed the clouds:
> Then, with his mace, the monarch struck the ground;
> With inward trembling earth received the wound,
> And rising streams a ready passage found."—
> *Ovid.*

Wilful Blindness! Ver. 22. Hosea says: Gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not. Old age steals on, and we are insensible of its encroachment. The hair is silvered—the eye loses its lustre—the limbs lack elasticity; and yet we take no thought of time. He knoweth it not. Nor does he desire to know it. Some individuals would efface each new mark of growing years, and shrink from every sad memento of approaching senility—as if ignorance of the fact would arrest the march of time, and each evidence of its ravages obliterated would win back the springtide of youth. These men loved not Noah for reminding them of their gradual declension in moral vigour, and of the rapidly approaching hour when moral death in aggravated form would close this decay. And when they saw him busily employed in preparing the ark, how much ridicule they heaped upon this "obedient servant of God," until

> **"The clouds went floating on their fatal way."**
> —*Procter.*

Bible! Ver. 22. There was a sculptor once who made a famous shield, and among the flowers and scrolls which adorned it he engraved his own name, so that whoever looked upon the shield would be sure to see it, and know who made it. Some people tried to erase the name, but they found that the man had put in the letters so cleverly as to render it impossible to take out *one* letter without spoiling the whole shield. Just so is it with the Bible and the name "Jesus." Hence that aged ambassador's counsel to his younger brother was full of potency and truth: There are hundreds of roads to our great English metropolis, so that no matter what point of the compass you start from, you will find that all bring you to London; and there are hundreds of truths in the Bible, and no matter what part of that holy book you take up, it ought to lead you to Christ. But as there are side-roads, and what John Bunyan calls "bye-paths," so take care that you do not as a preacher wander from the road of truth, otherwise your sermons will never reach to the "Crucified One"—

> "Who still for erring, guilty man,
> A Saviour's pity shows;
> While still His bleeding heart is touched
> With memory of our woes."—*Barbauld.*

CHAPTER VII.

Critical Notes.—**1. Righteous.]** The radical notion of this important word in Hebrew is, by Gesenius and Davies, affirmed to be that of "straightness," the quality of going evenly and directly to the end aimed at; but, by Fürst, is taken to be "firmness, hardness, hence strength, victoriousness." Either conception is interesting, and well fitted to give food for reflection. It is, perhaps, still more significant that Fürst regards the adjective *tzad-diq* as derived from the Piel conjugation of *tza-dhaq* viz. *tzid-dêq*, which signifies "to justify, make appear just, declare just;" and, hence, gives to the adjective something of the same forensic force, "justified." The evangelical importance of this can scarcely be overstated. And there are other critical and general reasons which may be brought forward in support of this account of the formation of the word *tzaddiq*. 1.) The use of the "verb of becoming" (ha-yah) in ch. vi. 9, should be noticed: "Noah had become a righteous and complete man." He had *become* so—how? 2) The writer to the Hebrews (ch. xi. 7) says that Noah "*became* heir of the righteousness which is by faith." Plainly then Noah was justified by faith. From this point of view we can welcome the comment of Murphy: "To be just is to be right in point of law, and thereby entitled to all the blessings of the acquitted and justified. When applied to the guilty, this epithet implies pardon of sin, among other benefits of grace. It also presupposes that spiritual change by which the soul returns from estrangement to reconciliation with God. Hence Noah is not only just but perfect:"—perhaps we might more exactly say, "complete," "ready." He was ready for the future, ready for the flood; it was meet that he should escape the flood, and become the progenitor of a new world. From this point of view, we can apprize the dicta of those who presume to attempt to set the Bible against itself by affirming that this story of Noah knows nothing of a fall!—**11. Great deep.]** "The great abyss—the mighty roaring deep:" Heb. t' —same word as in Gen. i. 2, Prov. viii. 24, &c.: Sept. and Vulg. "abyss." **Broken up.]**—Or, "burst open.—**Windows.]** Prop. "the latticed, enclosed; hence gen. window, flood-gate;" but Sept. "waterfalls."—**16. Shut him in.]** Lit. "Then does Jehovah shut up round about him." How touchingly beautiful! "Then"—a closing act, as when a mother closes up about her dear ones for the night: "Jehovah,"—the God of covenant grace, the Becoming One, ever becoming some further and something fresh to those who trust in him. It is He who performs this graceful and gracious act.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—16.

THE ARK COMPLETED; OR, THE TERMINATION OF DEFINITE MORAL SERVICE.

The ark was now finished, and Noah was commanded to enter it. Unless the good man had obeyed the Divine call and gone with his family into the ark, all his labour would have been in vain, he would have perished in the deluge. Christian service makes many demands, and to fail in one, is often to fail in all, it needs great fidelity and care from the time the first board of the ark is placed, till the last nail is struck, and the door is shut by heaven. It is not enough for man's salvation that provision is made for it, he must, by practical and personal effort, avail himself of it, or he will perish within its reach. The completion of the ark was:—

I. The termination of an arduous work. Now for nearly one hundred and twenty years, Noah had been engaged in building this wondrous floating chest in which he and his family were to be sheltered during the impending deluge:—1. *This termination would be a relief to his physical energies.* There can be little doubt that the building of this ark was a great tax upon the physical energy of Noah, it would involve the putting forth of every muscular activity within him, and day by day he would go home wearied with his toil. And this had been repeated day by day for over a century of time. Surely then the end of the enterprise would be gladly welcomed by him as a relief from such constant and arduous labour. And frequently the service of God requires great physical energy on the part of those to whom it is entrusted, it often requires a strong body as well as a strong soul to do the work of God efficiently, and hence its triumphant finish is welcome to the tired manhood. For the divinity of the service is no guarantee against the fatigue experienced in the lowest realm of work. The activities of men weary in spiritual service as in the most material duties of life. Moral service has a material side, for though it requires faith in God as a primary condition, it also requires the building of the ark, and it is here that fatigue overtakes the good man. This is a necessary consequence of our mortal circumstances, and in heaven will be superseded by an endurance which shall never tire. 2. *This termination would be a relief to his mental anxieties.* Truly the building of the ark in such times, under such conditions, and with the thoughts which must have been supremely potent within the mind of Noah, would be a great mental anxiety to him. He would not contemplate the mere building of the ark in itself, but in its relation to the world which was shortly to be destroyed. The moral condition of those around would be a continued pain to him. Then in the building of the ark, he would require all his mental energies, so that he might work out the design given to him by God, that he might make the best use of his materials, and that he might so control those who joined him in his labour that they might continue to do so to the end. It would be no easy matter to get fellow-helpers in so unpopular a task, hence his anxiety to retain those he had. In fact, it is impossible for us in these days to estimate the mental anxiety through which this good man passed during these years of extraordinary service; hence we can imagine the completion of the ark would be a welcome relief. The service of the Christian life does involve much anxiety as to the rectitude of the conscience, and the bearing of its issue upon our eternal destiny, and especially when it is connected with the retributions of God. Its completion in heaven will be a glad relief to the anxious soul. 3. *Its termination would inspire a sad but holy pride within his heart.* When Noah saw the ark completed before him in its rude strength, we can imagine that a feeling of sacred pride would arise within his heart, but soon would sorrow mingle with it as he thought of the doom so near at hand, which would sweep the unholy multitudes, and, amongst them, some of his own relatives, into a watery grave. And so Christian service often reviews its work, its calm faith, its patient energy, and its palpable result, with sacred joy, but when it is associated with the judgments of heaven upon the ungodly, the joy merges into grief and prayer. The best moral workman cannot stand unmoved by his ark, when he contemplates the deluge soon to overtake the degenerate crowds around, whom he would fain persuade to participate in the refuge he has built. Thus we see that the completion of service is the end of arduous work, and is succeeded by the rest of the ark. But this rest is only comparative and temporary. Providence never allows a great soul to be long idle. There is too much in the world for it to do, and there are but few to do it. There is only one Noah in a crowd.

II. The indication of abounding mercy. "For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights, &c., (v. 4). Here we find that God did not send the flood upon the ancient and degenerate world immediately the ark was built, but gave seven days interval between the completion of the ark and the outpouring of the final and terrible doom; in this we see a beautiful and winning pattern of the Divine mercy. The sinners of the age had already had one hundred and twenty years' warning, and had taken no heed of it, yet God lingers over them with tender compassion, as though He would rather their salvation even yet. Even now they might have entered the ark had any been so disposed. Thus the completion of the ark was made the occasion of a sublime manifestation of the compassion of God toward the sinner. And so the moral service of the good, when retributive in its character, is generally the time when Divine mercy makes its last appeal to those who are on the verge of the second death. 1. *This indication of mercy was unique.* Its occasion was unique. Neither before or since has the world been threatened with a like calamity. And the compassion itself was alone in its beauty and meaning. 2. *This indication of mercy was pathetic.* 3. *This indication of mercy was rejected.* The people regarded not the completion of the ark, they heeded not the mercy which would have saved them at the eleventh hour.

III. The signal for a wondrous phenomenon.—"Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of everything that creepeth upon the earth, there went in two and two unto Noah into the ark." (Vs. 8, 9). Soon upon the completion of the ark, the animals which are to be preserved from the ravages of the deluge, are guided by an unseen but Divine hand, to the ark. A powerful and similar instinct takes possession of all, and guides them to the scene of their intended safety. Some critics are unable to account for this strange phenomenon, they are at a loss to comprehend how animals of varied dispositions and habits should thus be brought together. This was the design of God, and was no doubt accomplished by His power. And so the completion of christian service is often followed by the most wondrous and inexplicable events, strange to men, understood by the good, arranged by God. Who can predict the mysterious phenomena which shall follow the completion of all the christian service of life; then the elements will melt with fervent heat, and the rocks will cover the world in their ruins!

IV. The Prophecy of an important future.—The completion of the ark, and the entrance of Noah and his family into it, is a prophecy of important things to come, when the ark of the world's salvation shall be finished, when the last soul shall have entered, and when eternity shall take the place of time.

Then Christ shall yield up the tokens of His mediatorial office to the Father of the universe, the good shall enter into their eternal safety, and the threatened retribution shall come upon the wicked. LESSONS: 1. *Let the good anticipate the time when all the fatigue and anxiety of moral service shall be at an end.* 2. *Let them contemplate the joy of successful sevvice for God.* 3. *Let them enter into all the meaning and phenomena of christian service.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES

GOD'S INVITATION TO THE FAMILIES OF THE GOOD.

Verse 1. **I. That the families of the good are exposed to moral danger.** They live in a degenerate world which is threatened by the retributions of God; they are surrounded, in all the enterprises and relations of life, by unholy companions; they are charmed by the pleasures of the world; they are tempted by the things they see, and their moral welfare is imperilled by the tumult of unhappy circumstances. Especially are the young members of the families of the good exposed to moral danger, through the vile publications of the press, the corruptions of the age, and through the passionate impulses of their own hearts. 1. *This danger is imminent.* 2. *It is alarming.* 3. *It should be fully recognised.* 4. *It should be provided against.* God sees the perils to which the families of the good are exposed through the conditions of their earthly life and temporal circumstances.

II. That the families of the good are invited to moral safety. 1. *They are invited to this safety after their own effort, in harmony with the Divine purpose concerning them.* Noah and his family had built the ark of safety they were invited to enter. They were not indolent in their desire to be saved from the coming storm. And so, there is a part which all pious families must take, a plan with which they must co-operate before they have any right to anticipate the Divine help. The parent who does not, by all the means in his power, seek the moral safety of his children, by judicious oversight, and by prayerful instruction, cannot expect God to open a door into any ark of safety for them. He can only expect that they will be amongst the lost in the coming deluge. 1. *The purpose concerning them was Divine in authority.* 2. *It was merciful in its intention.* 3. *It was sufficient to its design.* This purpose of salvation toward Noah and his family was from heaven; men can only keep their families from the evil of the world as they are Divinely instructed. It was full of mercy to the entire family circle, and exhibited the wonderous providence of God in His care for the families of the good.

III. That the families of the good should be immediate in their response to the Divine regard for their safety. How often do we see amongst the children of the best parents an utter disregard of all religious claims; it may be that the parents have not sought to turn the feet of their children toward the ark.

THE HOUSE IN THE ARK.

I. An exhibition of Divine care It was entirely an exhibition of Divine care that the ark was built and in readiness for this terrible emergency, as Noah would never have built it but for the command of God. So when we see a whole family walking in the paths, and enjoying the moral safety, of religion we cannot but behold and admire the manifold mercy and care of God.

II. A manifestation of parental love. Parents sometimes say that they love their children, and certainly they strive to surround them with all the temporal comforts of life, and yet neglect their eternal welfare. How is such neglect compatible with real love? A parent whose love for his children is true and worthy, will manifest it by a supreme effort to awaken within them desires and thoughts after God and purity.

III. The ideal and joy of domestic life. When the entire family and household is in the ark of moral safety, then domestic life reaches its highest dignity, its truest beauty, and its fullest joy. **Is your house in the ark?**

TRUE MORAL RECTITUDE.

"For thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation."

I. True moral rectitude maintained in degenerate times. Noah had retained his integrity of soul when the world beside him was impure. A pure soul can maintain its integrity against the multitude who go to do evil. Sinful companions and degenerate times are no excuse for faltering moral goodness. The goodness of Noah was (1) *Real.* (2) *Unique.* (3) *Stalwart.*

II. True moral rectitude observed by God. 1. *It is personally observed by God.* "For *thee* have I seen righteous before me." Though the Divine Being has the vast concerns of the great universe to watch over, yet He has the disposition and the time to observe solitary moral goodness. God's eye is always upon the good, to mark the bright unfolding of their daily life. 2. *It was observed by God in its relation to the age in which the good man lived.* "In this generation." The darkness of the age enhanced the lustre of Noah's rectitude. Every good man's life bears a certain relation to the age and community in which its lot has fallen. No man liveth unto himself. We should serve our generation by the will of God.

III. True moral rectitude rewarded by God. 1. *Rewarded by distinct commendation.* God calls Noah a righteous man. And to be designated such by the infallible Judge were certainly the greatest honour for the human soul. 2. *Rewarded by domestic safety.* The moral rectitude of the good exerts a saving and protective influence on all their domestic relationships. It environs the home with the love of heaven. Are you a righteous man, not before men, but in the sight of God?

1. God speaks to the good. 2. About their families. 3. About their security.

A righteous man:—1. A pattern. 2. A possibility. 3. A prophecy. 4. A benediction.

A righteous man:—1. Heaven's representative. 2. The world's hero 3. The safety of home.

The call itself is very kind, like that of a tender father to his children, to come in-doors when he sees night or a storm coming, come thou, and all thy house, that small family which thou hast, into the ark. Observe Noah did not go into the ark till God bade him; though he knew it was designed for his place of refuge, yet he waited for a renewed command, and had it. It is very comfortable to follow the calls of Providence, and to see God going before us in every step we take.—*(Henry and Scott.)*

Commands for duty Jehovah giveth, that His servants may see the performance of His promise.

The use of means must be, as well as having means, in order to salvation.

All souls appointed to salvation must enter the ark.

Providence of grace maketh souls righteous by looking on them. It giveth what it seeth.

That is righteousness indeed which standeth before God's face.

Verses 2, 3. It is God's prerogative only to judge creatures clean or unclean.

The distinction of clean and unclean among creatures is from special use, not from nature.

Clean and unclean creatures have their preservation from the word of God.

The certain number of creatures is

given by God in the preservation of them.

God's aim is in seven to two, that he would have cleanness outgrow uncleanness.

Beasts and fowls of heaven are God's care, to keep them for man.

This is plainly not the first appointment of a difference between clean and unclean beasts. The distinction is spoken of as, before this time, familiarly known and recognized. And what was the ground of this distinction? It could not certainly be anything in the nature of the beasts themselves, for we now regard them all indiscriminately as on the same footing, and we have undoubted Divine warrant for doing so. Nor could it be anything in their comparative fitness for being used as food, for animal food was not yet allowed. The distinction could have respect only to the rite of sacrifice. Hence arises another irresistible argument for the Divine origin and the Divine authority of that rite, and a proof also of the substantial identity of the patriarchal and the Mosaic institutions. The same standing ordinance of animal sacrifice—and the same separation of certain classes of animals from others as alone being clean and proper for that purpose—prevailed in both. The religion, in fact, in its faith and in its worship was exactly the same. In the present instance, in the order given to save so many of these clean beasts, there may have been regard had to the liberty which was to be granted to man after the flood to use them for food, as well as to the necessity of their being a supply of sacrifices. And in general, the clean beasts, and especially the fowls, were those which it was most important for the speedy replenishing and quickening of the earth, to keep alive in the greatest numbers.—(*Dr. Candlish.*)

Natural propagation by sexes is the ordinance of God.

God giveth the quickening power to all creatures on the earth.

God warns in season whom he means to save.

THE DIVINE THREAT OF DESTRUCTION.

Verse 4. **I. Very soon to be executed.** "For yet seven days," etc. The deluge, which had been predicted for nearly one hundred and twenty years, was near at hand. The immediate preparations were being completed. God's threats of judgment upon the sin of man are frequent, and repeated at important intervals. In one brief period the world would become silent as the tomb. Yet there was time for safety.

II. Very merciful in its commencement. "I will cause it to rain upon the earth." Thus the fountains of the great deep were not to be broken up at the onset, there was to be a progress in the impending doom. The judgments of God are gradual in their severity. Even during the continuance of the rain there would be time to repent. How men reject the mercy of God.

III. Very terrible in its destruction. "And every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth." 1. *The destruction was determined.* 2. *The destruction was universal.* 3. *The destruction was piteous.* If we could have surveyed the universal ruin, how forcibly should we have seen the retributive providence of God and the fearful destiny of sin.

IV. Very significant in its indication. Men appeal to the Fatherhood of God as a reason why the wicked should not meet with continued punishment in the future; what do they say about the punishment which was inflicted upon the world in olden times? Men might have argued that such a destruction would be repugnant to the Divine Fatherhood. Yet it occurred. And what if the continued punishment of the finally impenitent should ultimately prove to be a fact?

THE OBEDIENCE OF NOAH TO THE COMMANDS OF GOD.

Verse 5. **I. It was obedience rendered under the most trying circumstances.** Noah was now on the thresh hold of the doom threatened upon the degenerate world. He knew it. God had told him. The good man's heart was sad. He was full of wonder in reference to what would be his future experiences. He had not succeeded as a preacher. He had no converts to share the safety of his ark. But these sentiments of grief and wonder did not interrupt his loyal obedience to the commands of God. His earnest labours gave him little time to indulge the feelings of his heart. He walked by faith and not by feeling or sight.

II. It was obedience rendered in the most arduous work. It was no easy task in which Noah's obedience was remarkable. His was not merely the obedience of the ordinary Christian life; but it was the obedience of a saintly hero to a special and Divinely-given duty. He had obeyed God in building the ark; he had now to obey Him in furnishing it for the exigencies of the future. His obedience was co-extensive with his duty.

III. It was obedience rendered in the most heroic manner. Noah was a man capable of long and brave endurance; the energies of his soul were equal to the tasks of heaven. It required a brave man to act in these circumstances.

OLD AGE.

Verse 6. **I. Sublime in its rectitude.** Noah was now advancing into old age. Yet as his physical energy declines, the moral fortitude of his nature is increased. He was righteous before God. He was a pattern to men in wicked times. He was an obedient servant of the Eternal. The purity, strength, and nobleness of his character were brought out by the wondrous circumstances in which he was called to be the chief actor.

II. Active in its faith. Noah believed God. Believed His word concerning the threatened doom. He relied upon the character and perfections of God. Thus faith was the sustaining principle of his energetic soul. And but for it his advancing age would not have been so grand and dignified as it was. Faith in God is the dignity of the aged.

III. Eventful in its history. The entire life, but especially the advancing age of Noah, was eventful. The building of the ark. The occurrences of the flood. Men sometimes become heroes in their old age. The greatest events come to them late in life. So it was with Noah.

IV. Regal in its blessing. Noah was blessed with the favour of Heaven, with the commendation of God, and with safety in wondrous times of peril. Old age, when obedient to the command of God, is sure to be rich in benediction. It shall never lack due reward from approving heaven.

POPULAR REASONS FOR A RELIGIOUS LIFE.

Verse 7. "*Because of the waters of the flood.*" There are many motives urging men to seek the safety of their souls.

I. Because religion is commanded. Some men are good, because God requires moral rectitude from all His creatures, they feel it right to be pure. They wish to be happy, and they find that the truest happiness is the outcome of goodness.

II. Because others are Religious. Multitudes are animated by a desire to cultivate a good life because their comrades do. They enter the ark because of the crowds that are seen wending their way to its door.

III. Because religion is a safety. We are told that Noah's family went into the ark "because of the waters of the flood." Many only become religious when they see the troubles of life coming upon them; they regard piety as a refuge from peril.

Verse 8—10. Times of forbearance and vengeance are surely and distinctly stated by God.

God's time of patience being expired vengeance will come. "*They went in two and two,*" of their own accord by divine instinct. Noah was not put to the pains of hunting for them, or driving them in. Only he seems to have been six days in receiving and disposing of them in their several cells, and fetching in food. When God bids us to do this or that, never stand to cast perils; but set upon the work, yield "the obedience of faith," and fear nothing. The creatures came in to Noah without his care and cost. He had no more to do but to take them in and place them [*Trapp*].

Divine Threatenings:—1. That they will surely be executed. 2. At the time announced. 3. In the manner predicted. 4. With the result indicated

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 11—24.

THE DELUGE; OR, THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD UPON THE SIN OF MAN.

There are some who regard the deluge as the outcome of the natural workings of physical laws, and not as a miraculous visitation of heaven; they intimate that it was the ordinary result of flood and rain, so common in those Eastern climes. We think, however, that the supposition is far from being satisfactory, and is inadequate to the requirements of the case. It was evidently the result of supernatural intervention. The ordinary floods and rains of these Eastern countries have never exercised such a destructive influence upon the lives of men and animals either before or since. It was unique in its effects. And certainly if it had been the ordinary outcome of natural laws, it would have been of frequent occurrence. It is true that God sometimes sends his retribution through the ordinary workings of nature, thus rebuking and punishing the sin of man; but the deluge is no instance of this method of retribution. We are inclined to think that the flood occurred about April; certainly before Autumn. Both the time of its advent, the effect of its working, and the purpose of it, mark it as a miracle of heaven. As such Noah would regard it, and as such it is full of significant teaching to human souls.

I. That the chronology of the Divine judgments is important, and should be carefully noted and remembered. "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened." 1. *The chronology of Divine retribution is important as a record of history.* Some men are accustomed to regard historic dates as of very little importance, as things only to be learnt by the schoolboy. And certain it is that dates are not as important as facts or principles, but they have a significance peculiarly their own, and are generally evidences of credibility and certainty. We cannot afford to neglect them. History is full of them. They remind us of great transactions, of battles won. They are also important in the domestic life. They chronicle events both joyous and sad; the birth of a child, the death of a parent. They are useful in the Church, either to recall days of persecution, acts of heroism, and times of emancipation from the power of evil. It is well that the exact dates should be assigned to the judgments of heaven, that men may study and remember them, and that their anniversary may be hallowed by becoming reverence and prayer. In those primitive times the long lives of the greatest men were as calendars for the chronicle of important events, they denoted the progress of the world. And it is better to fasten history to the life of an individual than to the dead pages of a book, as men make the record they chronicle. We ought to be more minute students of the histories of God, and of His judgments upon the sin of man, as they relate to the inner life of the soul, and record a history no unaided human pen could write. 2. *The chronology of Divine retribution is important as related to the moral life and destinies of men.* The deluge is not merely a cold record of history, a transaction of the hoary past, but an event of more than ordinary moral meaning. It contains a great lesson for humanity to learn, and ought to be the continued study of men. It announces the terrible ruin which sin irretrievably works to the life and commerce of countries; that it destroys a multitude of lives, and renders the material universe a desolate watery grave. It shows that the judgments of God are determined, and that they are not deterred by consequences. How many souls would be hurried into an unwelcome eternity of woe by the deluge. Hence the date of such a calamity should never be obliterated from the mind of man; but should be the portal to all the great verities of which it is the symbol. 3. *The chronology of Divine retribution is important, as the incidental parts of Scripture bear a relation to those of greater magnitude.* We are not to regard the events and parts of Scripture as unrelated to each other; but as blending in one sublime harmony and purpose. The blade of grass is related to the tree. The flower is related to the star, and we are not to neglect the former because it is not of equal size to the latter. We must pay heed to the incidental and lesser portions of sacred history, even to its dates, as parts of a great and sacred whole, needful and useful.

II. That God hath complete control over all the agencies of the material universe, and can readily make them subserve the purpose of His will. "The same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up." 1. *The Divine Being can control the latent forces and the unknown possibilities of the universe.* Man is ignorant of the grand and untoward possibilities of the created world. He beholds things, announces their properties, defines their spheres of action, proclaims their names, and vainly imagines that he has exhausted their capability. Thus he views the sea and the dry land. But the most elementary forms of matter are unknown even to the most industrious investigator and to the most learned in scientific discovery. Men may write books about the wonders of the great deep, but their pages are as the mutterings of a child. Science cannot tabulate the resources of the earth; they are only seen by the eye of the Creator. They are only responsive to the touch of omnipotence. This consideration should make men reverent in mood when they speculate as to the future of the material structure in which they now reside. The, as yet, undrilled, yea, almost unknown, legions of the material world are ready at the call of heaven to rebuke and punish the misdoing of man. 2. *The Divine Being can control all the recognized and welcome agencies of the material universe, so that they shall be destructive rather than beneficial.* The agencies now brought into the service of Divine retribution were, in the ordinary method of things, life-giving and life-preserving. But immediately upon the behest of God they became most destructive in their influence. When Jehovah would reprove the sin of man He can easily change His choicest blessings into emissaries of pain and grief. He can make the fertilizing waters to overflow their banks and to drown the world they were intended to enrich. 3. *That the agencies of the material universe frequently co-operate with the providence of God.* The world in which man lives is so arranged that it shall minister to his need, enrich his commerce, and delight his soul. It was made for man. But not less was it made for God, primarily to be the outlet of His loving heart, but often to manifest His repugnance to moral evil. All the forces and agencies of nature are arranged on the side of moral rectitude under the command of the Eternal King of heaven and earth. They will reward the good. They will punish the wicked. They re-echo the voices of inspired truth. The waters of the mighty deep catch their rhythm from the truth of God. The Spanish armada was defeated by a storm more than by the arms of men. Providence is on the side of rectitude and truth.

III. That the retributive judgments of God are a signal for the good to enter upon the safety provided for them. "In the self-same day entered Noah, and

Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark." It was not enough for Noah to build an ark for his safety during the coming deluge; he must also enter it. And when the good man saw the rain falling upon the earth, he felt that the threatened judgment was near, and that the closing scenes had come upon the degenerate multitude. This was the signal for his final entrance into the ark. And so when the predicted end of the universe shall come, and all things are about to be destroyed by fire, then shall the good enter into the permanent enjoyment of the heavenly rest and condition, and the wisdom of their conduct will be acknowledged. But in that day men will stand in their own individuality, they will not be saved, as were the sons and relatives of Noah, because they belong to pious families. There will be many holy parents in the ark, while their wicked sons will be carried away by the great waters.

IV. That in Divine judgments, the agencies of retribution, which are destructive to the wicked, are sometimes effective to the safety and welfare of the good. "And the waters increased and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth." Thus we find that the same waters which were destructive to the wicked inhabitants of the ancient world, were in harmony with the provision made by Noah, and so enhanced his safety in these perilous times. And so it has sometimes occurred that the retributive events of Providence, which have been injurious to the sinful, have been a means of benediction to the good. The cloud may be a guide to the Israelites, whereas to the Egyptians it may only be a great darkness, or a wild flame. The rod of heaven may smite the evil and the good, but to the latter it blossoms and brings forth fruit.

V. That in the retributive judgments of God wicked men are placed without any means of refuge or hope. "And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven, were covered." The degenerate multitudes of that wicked age had no method of escape in the time of this terrible retribution. They had made no provision for the deluge; they had rejected the warnings of Noah. They might climb the tall trees, and ascend the high mountain, but the rising and angry tide soon swept them from their refuge. Men cannot climb above the reach of the judgment of God. They can only be saved in the appointed way, according to the Divine invitation. Those who despise the ark can be saved in no other manner. And so in the judgments which shall come upon the world in its last days, then those who have rejected the offers of mercy urged upon them by a faithful gospel ministry, will be without hope and without refuge amidst the terrible doom.

VI. That the measure and limits of the retributive judgments of God are divinely determined. "Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail." "And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days." The judgments of God are marked and definite as to their duration. They are determined beforehand in this respect, and are not left to wild caprice, or uncertain chance. The Divine Being determines how high the waters shall rise, and how long they shall prevail. He only knows the entire meaning of sin, and therefore alone arranges its punishment. God knows the measure of all human sorrow. LESSONS: 1. *That the judgments of heaven are long predicted.* 2. *That they are commonly rejected.* 3. *That they are wofully certain.* 4. *That they are terribly severe.* 5. *They show the folly of sin.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 11, 12. It is the Spirit's purpose that the Church should keep a true chronology of God's works.

Admirable is God's providence in keeping souls alive between waters above and beneath.

It is God's word alone to break and bind the fountains of the great deep, shut and open the windows of heaven.

At God's word heaven and the deep are both ready to destroy sinners.

"*In the second month.*" In April, as it is thought, when everything was in its prime and pride; birds chirping, trees sprouting, &c., nothing less looked for than a flood; then God "shot at them with an arrow suddenly," (Ps. lxiv. 7), as saith the Psalmist. So shall "sudden destruction" (1 Thess. v. 3) come upon the wicked at the last day, when they least look for it. So the sun shone fair upon Sodom the same day wherein, ere night, it was fearfully consumed. What can be more lovely to look on than the corn-field a day before harvest, or a vineyard before the vintage?—(*Trapp*).

Verses 13—15. An important and eventful day:—1 The fulfilment of promise. 2. The commencement of retribution. 3. The time of personal safety. 4. The occasion of family blessing.

Polygamy was not in the church saved from the waters.

Some of all kinds of creatures hath God's goodness saved in the common deluge.

The breath of life is in God's hand to give or take.

The animals:—1. Their number. 2. Their order. 3. Their obedience.

THE DOOR WAS SHUT.

Ver. 16. "*And the Lord shut him in,*" Gen. vii. 16. Noah could build the ark, could preach to the people, could bear all manner of scorn and contempt, but I conceive, strong man as he was, there was one thing he could not do, that was to shut the door of the ark against the people who in a few hours would clamour for admittance. We can readily picture to ourselves this great-hearted man as he receives the last creature into the ark, looking round on the crowd who wondered and scoffed at his procedure. There he sees his old workmen, young wives leaning on their strong husbands; little children playing with simple gladness; old men and women leaning on their staffs; perhaps distant relatives and friends. What conflict must have raged in his bosom at the thought of cutting them off from the only means of salvation, from the awful and impending doom which awaited the world. *It was too much for Noah to do, so the Lord shut him in!* Let us meditate on the significance of this act.

I. It teaches us, as God is the author so also is he the finisher of our work. God implants in the mother's heart the desire to teach her children of Himself, but He must apply the instruction. Paul may plant and Apollos water, but God must give the increase. The seeker after salvation may pray, and read the word, and attend the means of grace, but God only can save the soul. We may speak words of comfort to the distressed, the Holy Spirit must convey the message to the heart.

II. It teaches that they who do His will shall not go unrewarded. Noah built the ark, so God insures his safety therein. Paul may fear lest after doing God's will in preaching to others, that he shall be a castaway; but he has no ground for alarm. Paul was never less like himself than when he said those words, or rather when he was distressed with that fear. The righteous cannot know the misery of rejection. Those who put their trust in God shall never be confounded.

III. It teaches that those who do God's will are preserved from all dangers. The Lord shut him in! so that he might not perpetrate any rash act. Had he possessed the power of opening the door, he might have jeopardized the safety of the whole family by bringing down the vengeance of God. Noah's had been a critical position but for this. Think of him as he hears the rush of waters; the shrieks of the drowning; the cries of the young and old. If you had been in his position, with the knowledge you could open the door, and take some in, would you not have been tempted to do so? But God shut him in, and when He shutteth no man can open. So shall God fortify the soul at the great day of final judgment. Mothers, fathers, children, shall see their relatives cast out, and yet be preserved from one rash word, or unbelieving act.

IV. It teaches that those who do God's will must not expect immediate reward. Noah becomes a prisoner—for five months he had no communication from God—for twelve months he resided in the ark. But God remembered Noah and brought him out into a wealthy place.

V. It teaches that the hand which secures the saint destroys the sinners. As God shut Noah in, insuring his safety, He shut out the world to experience the fearful doom of their sin. Hereafter the door shall be shut. *On which side will you be.*—[*Stems and Twigs.*]

THE DIVINE COMMANDS.

Verse 16. "*As God had commanded him.*" I. The Divine commands are severe in their requirements. Noah was required by them to build an ark, which would involve him in much anxiety and labour. He was exposed to the ridicule and fanaticism of men in so doing; for the commands of God relate to unseen things and to future events, and are not understood by the wicked. The commands of God often impose a great and continuous service, somewhat difficult to be performed. They sometimes place men in important and critical stations of life.

II. **The Divine commands are extensive in their requirements.** They relate not merely to the building of the ark as a whole, but to every minute detail in the great structure; and so in the moral life of man, the commands of God have reference to all the little accidents of daily life. They extend to the entire manhood—to its every sphere of action. If we offend in little, we are verily guilty of sad disobedience.

III. **The Divine commands are influential to the welfare of man.** Through obedience to the commands of God, Noah was preserved from the deluge; and if men would only obey the voice of God in all things, they would be shielded from much harm, and many perils. Obedience renders men safe, safe from the guilt of sin, and from the woe of Divine retribution. Thus the commands of God, though they may involve arduous service through many years, and though they extend to the entire life of man, are nevertheless influential to the temporal and eternal welfare of obedient souls.

INCREASED AFFLICTION.

Verse 17. "*And the waters increased.*" I. **That affliction is progressive in its development and severity.** In the first place the rain is sent, then the fountains of the great deep are broken up, and then the high hills are covered with water. "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." (Ps. 42—7). Sorrow does not generally advance upon men all at once, its cold wave gradually rises and chills their hearts. How many souls in the wide world could write a mournful comment on the gradual increase of human grief.

II. **That increased affliction is the continued and effective discipline and punishment of God.** The waters of the deluge were designed to exterminate the sinful race which had corrupted the earth, and hence they covered the highest mountains, that all life should be destroyed. Augmented affliction is often occasioned by sin, and is intended to punish and remove it.

Every word of vengeance must exactly be fulfilled which God hath spoken.

God's judgments are gradual on the wicked.

Waters of death to some, are made waters of life to others by the word of God.

Verses 19—24. The bounds of nature cannot keep water from destroying, when God makes it to overflow.

Not a word of God falls to the ground concerning those whom he appoints to ruin.

No kind of life can be exempt from death, when wickedness giveth up to vengeance.

The times of increasing and perfecting vengeance are determined by God. He measures waters and numbers days.

THE ALMOST SOLITARY PRESERVATION OF A GOOD MAN FROM IMMINENT AND LONG-CONTINUED PERIL.

Verse 23. "*And Noah only remained alive and they that were with him in the ark.*"

I. **Then moral goodness is sometimes a safeguard from the imminent perils of life.** The Christian Church is constantly being reminded that the good share the dangers and calamities of the wicked, and that the same event happens to all irrespective of moral character. But this statement is not always true, for even in the circumstances of this life moral goodness is often a guarantee of safety. Heavenly ministries are ever attendant upon the good, to keep them in all their ways. God often tells good men of the coming woe, and also shows them how to escape it. Purity is wisdom.

II. Then moral goodness is signally honoured and rewarded by God. Of all the inhabitants of that ancient and degenerate world, many of them illustrious and socially great, only Noah and his relatives were saved from the destructive deluge. In this we see the true honour which God puts upon the good, as well as the safety by which He environs them. It is honourable to be morally upright.

III. Then moral goodness may sometimes bring a man into the most unusual and exceptional circumstances. It may make a man lonely in his occupation and life-mission, even though he be surrounded by a crowded world; it may make him unique in his character, and it may render him solitary in his preservation and safety. Noah was almost alone in the ark; he would be almost alone in his occupation of the new earth on which he would soon tread. And thus goodness often makes men sublimely unique in their circumstances. It requires a brave heart to be equal to the requirements of such a position.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VII.

BY THE

REV. WM. ADAMSON.

Submission! Ver. 1. Oaks may fall when reeds brave the wind. These giants fought the winds of Divine Judgment and fell; while Noah—like the bending reed so slight and frail—escaped the storm:—

> "And every wrong and every woe, when put
> beneath our feet,
> As stepping-stones may help us on to His
> high mercy-seat.

Earnestness! Ver. 1. Robert Hall, in his *Village Dialogues*, refers to a Mr. Merriman, a preacher, who used to be seen at every fair and revel, but was seldom to be found in the pulpit. When he was converted he began to preach with tears running down his cheeks. He could not contemplate unmoved the pitiable condition of many of his hearers—unprepared to die. Fleming mentions one John Welsh, who was often found on the coldest winter nights weeping on the ground, and wrestling with the Lord on account of his people. When his wife pressed him for an explanation of his distress, he said: "I have the souls of three thousand to answer for; while I know not how it is with many of them." No doubt Noah had his thousands, over whom he wept—with whom he pleaded—for whom he prayed, that they might be persuaded to participate in the Refuge-Ark.

> "He spread before them, and with gentlest
> tone,
> Did urge them to the shelter of that ark
> Which rides the wrathful deluge."—
> *Sigourney.*

Antediluvians! Ver. 4. These men were very anxious about the body, but troubled themselves but little about the soul. How foolish for a man, who has received a richly-carved and precious statue from abroad, to be very much concerned about the case in which it was packed, and to leave the statue to roll out into the gutter. Every man has had committed to him a statue moulded by the most ancient of sculptors—God. What folly then for him to be solicitous about the case in which God has packed it—I mean the body, and to leave the soul to roll into the mire of sin and death! Is it wise,

> "Or right, or safe, for some chance gains to-day,
> To dare the vengeance from to-morrow's skies?"

Gospel-Light! Ver. 6. This thrilling event loses well-nigh all its interest for us apart from Christ. He is in this incident as the sunlight in the else-darkened chamber; and this incident is in Him bright as the cold green log, which is cast into the flaming furnace, glows through and through with ruddy and transforming heat:—

> "And it will live and shine when all beside
> Has perished in the wreck of earthly things."

Parental Piety! Ver. 7. Among those who rose for prayers one night at a schoolhouse meeting were three adult children of an aged father. The old man's heart was deeply moved as he saw them rise. He was now to reap the fruit of all his years of sowing principles of piety in their youthful minds. When he rose to speak, the room was silent, and many cheeks wet with tears. With a full heart and tremulous voice the aged father once more urged his offspring, with a simple earnestness that thrilled every heart, to give their hearts to the Lord. And as they rode home at night along the prairie slopes in the beautiful moonlight, his quivering voice could still be heard proclaiming the blessings of Christ to his children :—The sound was balm,

> "A seraph-whisper to their wounded heart,
> Lulling the storm of sorrow to a calm."—
> *Edmeston.*

Righteous! Ver. 1. Francis de Sales remarks that as the mother-o'-pearl fish lives in the sea without receiving a drop of salt water, so the godly live in an ungodly world without becoming ungodly. As towards the Chelidonian Islands springs of fresh water may be found in the midst of the sea—and as the firefly passes through the flame without burning its wing, so a vigqurous Christian may live in the world without being affected with any of its humours.

> "Some souls are serfs among the free,
> While others nobly thrive."—*Procter.*

Home Piety! Ver. 7. At the time of the recent Indian outbreak, the missionary among them was advised of his danger, just as his family were engaging in prayer. They went through their united devotions as usual; and before they were done, the savages were in the house. Taking a few necessaries, they hastened to conceal themselves. Though often in sight of the Indians and of burning buildings, they escaped all injury, and made a long journey in an open country without hurt. Doubtless the God whom they honoured sent an angel-guard to defend them against all their enemies. And such a guard had the devout family of Noah. Many a time did his words fret and irritate the workmen and neighbours, until they were well-nigh ready to stone him; but as God preserved Enoch in one way, and David in another, so did He protect this pious household—shutting the mouths of the lions.

Forbearance! Ver. 4. As an old thief who has a long time escaped detection and punishment is emboldened to proceed to greater crime, thinking that he shall always escape; so, many impenitent go on in sin, thinking that—because God does not at once punish them—therefore, they shall escape altogether.

> "Woe! Woe! to the sinner; his hopes, bright but vain,
> Will turn to despair, and his pleasures to pain;
> To whom in the day of distress will he fly!
> —*Hunter.*

Instruction! Ver. 5. As to the antediluvian sinners, the 120 years were designed as a breathing time for repentance, so God made it a period of instruction for Noah. During all that time, he was learning—learning more about God, about His holiness and grace—about, it may be, His sublime scheme of redemption in Christ. Noah, like all saints, had to be schooled. He had to get new gleams of practical wisdom throughout those years—gleams which were to lighten the gloom of the weary and monotonous sojourn in the ark. No doubt, like ourselves, he did not relish the schooling. Perhaps he was angry rather than thoughtful when some new thought came to him, or some new truth flashed its bull's-eye glare upon him; just as when one gets a new piece of furniture, all the other pieces have to be arranged and re-arranged in order to make it straight. Noah had a long education for the ark-life; and no doubt he appreciated its advantages while the huge, rude pile floated amid showers and seas, and chanted the grand anthem :—

> "'Tis glorious to suffer,
> 'Tis majesty to wait."

Endurance! Ver. 5. A virtuous and well-disposed person is like a good metal—the more it is fired, the more it is fined. The more Noah was opposed, the more he was approved. Wrongs might well try and touch him, but they could not imprint on him any false stamp.

> "Content all honour to forego,
> But that which come from God."—*Kelly.*

Obedience! Ver. 5. Is there not one force which goes far to throw down the dark barriers that separate man from man, and man from woman—one mighty emotion whose breath makes them melt like wax, and souls blend together, and be one in thought and will—in purpose and hope? And when that one uniting force in human society—love built upon confidence—is diverted from the poor finite creatures, and transferred from one another to Him, then the soul cleaves to God as ivy tendrils to the oak, and the soul knows no higher delight—no supremer ecstasy than to do His will. As Bishop Hall says, there is no perfume so sweet as the holy obedience of the faithful. What a quiet safety—what an heavenly peace doth it work in the soul, in the midst of all the inundations of evil.

> "I run no risk, for come what will,
> Thou always hast Thy way."

Animal Life! Ver. 9. In the morning, writes Spurgeon, when the ark-door was opened, there might be seen in the sky a pair of eagles and a pair of sparrows—a pair of vultures a and pair of humming-birds—a pair of all kinds of birds that ever cut the azure, that ever floated on the wing, or that ever whispered their song to the evening gales. Snails came creeping along. Here a pair of snakes—there a pair of mice presented themselves—behind them a pair of lizards or locusts. So there are some who fly so high in knowledge that few are ever able to scan their great and extensive wisdom; while there are others so ignorant that they can hardly read their Bibles. Yet both must come to the ONE DOOR—Jesus Christ, who says: "I am the Door."

> "Blest Saviour, then, in love,
> Fear and distress remove;
> O bear me safe above.
> A ransomed soul."—*Palmer.*

Flood! Ver 11. The scientific man asserts as the latest generalization of his science, that there is in nature the uniformity of natural sequence, in other words, that nature always moves along the same path, and that law is a necessity of things. He thus indirectly asserts the probability of miracles, indeed, he admits them. For, where there is no law, there is no transgression; and the very belief in miracles depends upon this uniformity. In nature we and deviations from this law of uniformity; and so it is in the region of providence and grace. God has a certain course of dealing generally with man, and He is pleased to diverge from that course at times, as in this instance of the flood, of Sodom's miraculous overthrow, and of Pharaoh's destruction in the Red Sea. Thus—

"Nature is still as ever
The grand repository where He hides
His mighty thoughts, to be dug out like
diamonds."—*Bigg.*

Lessons! Ver. 11. It is not enough to follow in the track of the deluge, and listen to the wail of the antediluvians; it is not enough to analyse philosophically the causes of the earth's upheaval and overflow; it is not enough to regard the narrative as a school for the study of Noah's character, and to gaze with an admiration that is almost awe upon one of the stalwart nobility of mankind. We must draw the lessons which the record is designed to teach, how abhorrent sin is in the sight of God in all ages, how earnest He is in the preservation of His saints to the end of time, how He shapes the things of time and sense for the evolution of His own design, educing order from its vast confusions, and resolving its complications into one grand and marvellous unity, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, and how He can and will accomplish all that He has purposed in spite of wrath of men, or rage of seas:—

"For what He doth at first intend,
That He holds firmly to the end."—
Herrick.

Divine Dates! Ver. 12. Man's dates are often trivial, as we see in the pages of an almanac or diary. Not so with the Divine chronology. His dates stand out like suns amid encircling stars. Around them human dates must constellate. Therefore He does not despise them. With Him they are no trifle; and He would have us view them in the same light, regarding each date in the Divine chronology as the poet expressed himself of nature, that—

"Each moss,
Each shell, each crawling insect, holds a rank
Important in the plan of Him who framed
This scale of beings."—*Thomson.*

Helplessness! Ver. 18. "A man overboard!" is the cry! Then the passengers lean over the bulwarks with eyes riveted on the spot where a few rising airbells tell his whereabouts. Presently the head emerges above the wave, then the arms begin to buffet the water. With violent efforts he attempts to shake off the grasp of death, and to keep his head from sinking. He makes instinctive and convulsive efforts to save himself; though these struggles only exhaust his strength, and sink him all the sooner. When the horrible conviction rushed into the souls of the antediluvian sinners that the flood had really come, how they must have struggled, clutching at straws and twigs in the vain hope of physical salvation. Yet, though the bodies of all perished; shall we doubt that the spirits of many were pardoned! As it is at times with the dying sinner, when the horrible conviction rushes into his soul that he is lost, when he feels himself going down beneath a load of guilt, he grasps that which before he despised; so these drowning wretches clutched at the saving truth of Noah's preaching. They were saved, yet so as by fire, as—

"With failing eye, and thickening blood,
They prayed for mercy from their God."—
Studley.

Chronology! Ver. 12. The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done, and there is no new thing under the sun. Spring clothes the earth with verdure; summer develops this verdure into its highest beauty and luxuriance; autumn crowns it with ripeness and fruitfulness; but Winter comes with its storms and frosts apparently to destroy all. Yet this apparently wanton destruction tends more to advance the progress of nature than if summer were perpetual. Just so with the Divine retribution of the deluge. As the wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about to the north; as it whirleth continually, and returneth again according to his circuits; so with the flood of waters. It was a part of the Divine plan, by which moral progress should be made, so that creation might by retrogression rise to a higher platform of inner life. Schiller says that the Fall was a giant stride in the history of the human race. So was the Divine retribution at the deluge. A wise and benevolent purpose lay hid under the apparently harsh and severe judgment. It was not only a terrible remedy for a terrible disease, but also a lever by which humanity was raised nearer to God. Dark as it was, the darkness was needed to display the lights, in it we see the sable robe,

"Of the Eternal One, with all its rich,
Embroidery and emblazonment of stars."

God's Door! It was shut as much for the security of those within, as for the exclusion of those without. When the father nightly bars the house-door, he does it for the protection of his family who are safely slumbering. God shut the door not merely to signify that the day of grace was past, but to secure the comfort and safety of Noah and his family from perishing by water. For this then was it that

"The ark received her freightage, Noah last,
And God shut to the door."

Security! Swinnock says of travellers on the top of the Alps that they can see the great showers of rain fall under them—deluging the plains and flooding the rivers—while not one drop of it falls on them. They who have God for their refuge and ark are safe from all storms of trouble and showers of wrath. Noah and his family had no wetting though the windows of heaven yawned wide enough for seas to descend.

"Yes! Noah, humble, happy saint,
Surrounded with the chosen few,
Sat in his ark, secure from fear,
And sang the grace that steered him through."

Troubles! Ver. 18. An old Puritan said that God's people were like birds: they sing best in cages. The people of God sing best when in the deepest trouble. Brooks says: The deeper the flood was, the higher the ark went up to heaven. God imprisoned Noah in the ark that he might learn to sing sweetly. No doubt the tedium of their confinement was relieved by many a lark-like carol. The elements would make uproar enough at the first; but God could hear their song as well as when the commotion in nature ceased, and

"None were left in all the land,
Save those delivered by God's right hand,
As it were in a floating tomb."

Graduation! Ver. 19. Sorrows come not single spies, but in battalions. This gradual increase of human grief—this progressive rise of the waters of affliction is doubtless designed to lead men to repentance. It is said that when a rose-tree fails to flower, the gardener deprives it of light and moisture. Silent and dark it stands, dropping one faded leaf after another. But when every leaf is dropped: then the florist brings it out to bloom in the light. God sought by the graduation of the waters of the flood—by the progressive loss of each foothold, to awaken men to repentance. Over the result He has cast a veil; but hope prompts the thought that some sought and obtained mercy, before—

"Beast, man and city shared one common grave,
And calm above them rolled the avenging wave,
Whilst yon dark speck, slow-floating, did contain
Of beast or human life the sole remain."—*Procter*.

Judgment! Ver. 20. The men of the age of Noah were not more taken by surprise when the windows of heaven were opened to rain upon the earth—the men of Jerusalem were not struck with greater consternation when the eagles of Rome came soaring towards them, bearing on their wings the vengeance of one mightier than Cæsar—than the men of the last day shall be. Signs and wonders shall, no doubt, precede the coming of that day; but the men then living will fail to take note of these signs! But why is it thus? Has Providence any delight in snaring the sinner? No; but he is blinded and infatuated by his own sin. No matter how plain the warnings of approaching doom may be, he passes on with an eye that will not see! No matter how terribly it may lighten and thunder, he has no ear to hear; until at length he is taken and destroyed—receiving as he sinned

"The weight
And measure of eternal punishment
Weigh'd in the scales of Perfect Equity."—*Bickersteth*.

Divine Care! Ver. 23. A pious old man who had served God for many years, was sitting one day with several persons, eating a meal upon the bank near the mouth of a pit in the neighbourhood of Swansea. While he was eating, a dove, which seemed very tame, came and fluttered in his breast and slightly pecked him. It then flew away, and he did not think much about it; till in five minutes it came again, and did the same. The old man then said: "I will follow thee, pretty messenger, and see whence thou comest." He rose up to follow the bird; and whilst he was doing so, the banks of the pit fell in. On his return he discovered that all his companions were killed. Thus was Noah preserved!

"Who then would wish or dare, believing this,
Against His messengers to shut the door!"
—*Lowell*.

CHAPTER VIII.

Critical Notes.—4. Ararat] "A region nearly in the middle of Armenia, between the Araxes and the lakes Van and Urumia (2 Kings xix. 37, Isa. xxxvii. 38: ['land of Armenia,' *lit.* 'of Ararat'], even now called by the Armenians *Ararat*, on the mountains of which the Ark of Noah rested; sometimes used in a wider sense of the whole of Armenia (Jer. li. 27) itself." (Gesenius.) "It is especially the present *Aghri Dagh* or the great Ararat (Pers. *Kuhi Nuch*, i.e. Noah's mountain, in the classics ὁ Ἄβος, Armen. *massis*) and *Kutshuk Dagh* or little Ararat." (Fürst.) "As the drying wind most probably came from the east or north, it is likely that the ark was drifted towards Asia Minor, and caught land on some hill in the reaches of the Euphrates. It cannot be supposed that it rested on either of the peaks now called Ararat, as Ararat was a country, not a mountain, and these peaks do not seem suitable for the purpose." (Murphy.)—**5. And the waters decreased]** In the Heb. the construction here so changes as to impart a dramatic life and variety to the composition. Following the idiom of the original, we may render verses 4 and 5 thus: "Then does the ark rest, in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat. But the WATERS have come to be going on and decreasing as far as the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, have appeared the tops of the mountains." Note the emphasis thrown on "THE WATERS," and the contrast thereby implied: as much as to say, "The ark becomes stationary; not so THE WATERS—THEY *go on* decreasing for more than two months more." As nature abhors a vacuum, so does the sacred story abhor monotony. As it progresses, the feeling changes, the lights and shades are altered; under-tones are heard, glimpses of new views are caught. The ever-varying manner of the original should delight the student and admonish the public reader and the preacher.—**6. Window.]** Properly, "hole:" not the same word as in ch. vi. 16.—**7. Raven.]** Probably so called from its blackness (Gesenius, Fürst): from its cry or croaking (Davies).—**8. Dove.]** A tender, mild bird; emblem of *purity*, Sol. Song i. 15, iv. 1, v. 12; *love*, ibid v. 2, vi. 9; *simplicity*, Hos. vii. 11, Matt. x. 16; with *melancholy* note, Isa. xxxviii. 14, Nah. ii. 7, Eze. vii. 16; and *quick homeward* flight, Isa. lx. 8; Ps. lv. 6; Hos. xi. 11.—**21. For the imagination.]**—The "For" is apparently an unhappy rendering. Better, with Leeser, "although," or with Young, "though:" better still, with Murphy, "because." God will not again make man's wickedness a "cause" or reason for bringing in a flood of waters.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—5.

The Gradual Cessation of Divine Retribution.

I. That it is marked by a rich manifestation of Divine mercy to those who have survived the terrible retribution. "And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark." We are not to imagine from this verse, that God, had at any time during the flood, been unmindful of the ark and its privileged inhabitants, but simply that now He has them in especial remembrance, being about to deliver them from their temporary confinement. The Divine mercy is always rich toward man, but especially toward the good, in critical junctures of their history. Noah was indeed in a position to appreciate the loving attentions of heaven. Nor was the Divine remembrance limited to Noah and his relatives, but it extended to the animals under his care; thus *extensive* and all including is the providence of God in its beneficent design toward the wide universe. 1. *God's remembrance of his creatures during the cessation of retribution is merciful.* True, Noah was a good man, and, in entering the ark, was obeying a Divine command, but what intrinsic right had he to such distinguished protection, and to the special remembrance of heaven? He could only receive it as the unmerited gift of God. God remembers the good in their afflictions, and that he does so is the outcome of His own merciful disposition toward them. Men would only get their desert if they were left to perish in the ark, on the wide waste of water on which it sails. Anything short of this is of God's abundant compassion. 2. *God's* *remembrance of his creatures during the cessation of retribution is welcome.* We can readily imagine that the ark would not be the most comfortable abode for Noah and his comrades, it would be confined in its space, and certainly not over choice in its companionships or select in its cargo. And while it was admirably adapted to the immediate use for which it was constructed, yet we doubt not that its occupants would be glad to escape from its imprisonment. The Divine remembrance of them at this time was the herald of their freedom; now they will soon tread the solid but silent earth again. God's remembrance of His creatures after times of judgment, is generally the signal of good concerning them, the token of greater liberty, and of enhanced joy, even in the secular realm of life. 3. *God's remembrance of his creatures during the cessation of retribution is condescending.* That the Divine King of heaven should give even a transient thought to a few individuals and animals, sailing on a wide sea, in an ark of rude construction, is indeed as great a mystery as condescension, and is evidence of the care which He extends to all His works. And thus it is that God adapts Himself to the moral character of man, and to the condition of all human creatures, in that he drowns the wicked in judgment, but remembers his servants in love. Thus He makes known His attributes to the race.

II. That it is marked by the outgoing and operation of appropriate physical agencies. "And God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged." There have been many conjectures in reference to the nature and operation of this wind; some writers say that it was the Divine Spirit moving upon the waters, and others, that it was the heat of the sun whereby the waters were dried up. We think controversy on this matter quite unnecessary, as there can be little doubt that the wind was miraculous, sent by God to the purpose it accomplished. He controls the winds. Jonah in the storm. The disciples in the tempest. And He would thus send out a great wind to agitate the waters that they might cease from covering the earth. God often sends his ordinary messengers on extraordinary errands. He has not to create or originate new forces to achieve new tasks, He can adapt the existing condition of nature to all the exigencies of life. And thus it happens that the cold bitter winds that blight our hopes, are sometimes commissioned to assuage our sorrows; one agency may be employed in manifold service. Hence we cannot antecedently estimate results by the agencies employed. The Divine Being generally works by instrumentality. 1. *Appropriate.* 2. *Effective.* 3. *Natural.* And in this way is the cessation of divine retribution brought about.

III. That it is marked by a staying and removal of the destructive agencies which have hitherto prevailed. "The fountains also of the great deep, and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained; and the waters returned from off the earth continually; and after the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated." And thus when the destructive elements have done their work, they are restrained by the authority which gave them their commission to go forth. There are perhaps few nations on the face of the globe but have experienced times of famine and pestilence, and how glad have been the indications that these destructive agencies have stayed their raging. These fierce agencies of the material universe, when let loose upon man, make terrible havoc; are almost irresistible; will neither yield to entreaty or to skill. They have their time, and when their mission is accomplished they return to their original tranquillity. Here we see:—1. *That the destructive agencies of the universe are awakened by sin.* 2. *That the destructive agencies of the universe are subdued by the power and grace of God.* 3. *That the destructive agencies of the universe are occasional and not habitual in their rule.* The deluge of waters was not the frequent phenomenon of nature.

but was a miracle wrought for the purposes of the degenerate age. The fierce agencies of the universe are under Divine control, they are not supreme, but are the emissaries of holy justice. The most awful retributions of God come to an end, and break again into the clear shining of His mercy.

IV. That it is marked by a gradual return to the ordinary things and method of life. "And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month: in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, were the tops of the mountains seen." Thus the tops of the mountains were visible, though they would not be seen by the inmates of the ark, as the window was not in a convenient position to admit of this, and they would not be able to open the door. And so the retributive judgments of God return to the ordinary ways of life, they do not permanently set aside the original purpose of creation. This return to the ordinary condition of nature is:—1. *Continuous.* 2. *Rapid.* 3. *Minutely chronicled.* The world is careful to note the day on which appeared the first indication of returning joy, when after a long period of sorrow the mountain tops of hope were again visible. It is fixed in the memory. It is written in the book. It is celebrated as a festival. LESSONS: 1. *That the judgments of God, though long and severe, will come to an end.* 2. *That the cessation of Divine judgment is a time of hope for the good.* 3. *That the cessation of Divine judgment is the commencement of a new era in the life of man.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. God's gracious ones may be regarded as forsaken by the Lord. (Ps. xiii. 1).

God's free grace keepeth his saints in mind when they seem to be forgotten.

The manifestation of God's care and help to his desolate ones is joined with his remembrance of them.

God careth for the lower creatures for the sake of his Church.

Grace can create means, and render them effectual to salvation.

At the call of God, that which would otherwise enrage the waters, shall appease them.

God repeals his judgment by means, as well as imposeth them.

"*And God remembered Noah.*" He might begin to think that God had forgotten him, having not heard from God for five months together, and not yet seeing how he could possibly escape. He had been a whole year in the ark; and now was ready to groan out that doleful *Usquequo Domine:* Hast thou forgotten to be merciful? etc. But forgetfulness befalls not the Almighty. The butler may forget Joseph, his father's house; Ahasuerus may forget Mordecai; and the delivered city the poor man that by his wisdom preserved it (Eccles. ix. 15). The Sichemites may forget Gideon; but "God is not unfaithful to forget your work and labour of love," saith the Apostle (Heb. vi. 10). And there is a "book of remembrance written before him," saith the prophet, "for them that fear the Lord." (Mal. iii. 16.) A metaphor from kings that commonly keep a calendar or chronicle of such as have done them good service: as Ahasuerus (Esth. vi. 1), and Talmerlane, who had a catalogue of their names and good deserts, which he daily perused, oftentimes saying that day to be lost wherein he had not given them something. God also is said to have such a book of remembrance. Not that he hath so, or needeth to have; for all things, both past and future, are present with him: he hath the idea of them within himself, and every thought is before his eyes, so that he cannot be forgetful. But he is said to remember his people (so he is pleased to speak to our capacity) when he showed his care of us, and makes good his promise to us. We also are said to be his "remembrancers" (Isa. lxii. 6) when we plead his promise, and press him to performance. Not that we persuade him thereby to do us good, but we persuade our own hearts to more faith, love, obedience, etc., whereby we become more capable of that good.—*(Trapp).*

Verses 2, 3. "*And the rain from heaven was restrained.*" These four keys, says the Rabbins, God keeps under his own girdle: 1. Of the womb; 2. Of the grave; 3. Of the rain; 4. Of the heart. "He openeth, and no man shutteth; he shutteth, and no man openeth." (Rev. iii. 7.)—*(Trapp).*

God's method of healing is contrary to that of wounding. Wind, fountains of deep, and windows of heaven are at God's disposal.

All creatures move with agility and constancy at God's word for the deliverance of the Church.

God has his set time, and at that moment judgments must cease, and salvation appear to his saints.

Verses 4, 5. No hazards shall prevent the means appointed for the safety of the Church from perfecting it. The tossing of waters shall not endanger the ark, so long as God steers it.

God vouchsafes a partial rest unto his Church below, as an earnest of the full.

Time and place are appointed by God for performing mercy to his Church.

Waters must go and fall for the comfort of the Church, under the command of God.

Mercies are measured to months and days.

God gives His Church mercy, and to see it.

Now this mountain of Ararat is at least, according to the statements of the most recent visitors, 17,000 feet in height, that is to say, rather more than three times the height of the highest mountain in Scotland. Well, then, if the waters of the flood rose to such a height that they covered its summit, and by subsiding, enabled the ark to rest quietly on that summit, I cannot see how it is possible to escape the conclusion, which Hitchcock in his work on geology denies, however, that the waters did cover the whole habitable globe, round and round. The assertions of Scripture are so broad and so strong, that I cannot see how to escape their force. And then, the language is repeated: "abated from off the earth."—"The waters prevailed upon the earth." Now, let any honest, impartial reader of this chapter say what would be the impression upon his mind; and I am sure it would be, that the flood there described was universal. And, as I stated before, if the flood was not universal, if it was topical, why did Noah take into the ark creatures found in every climate of the earth? For instance, the raven, I believe, exists almost everywhere; the dove certainly is found in eastern, western, northern, and southern latitudes. What was the use of preserving a bird that must have lived everywhere? And, when the dove went out of the ark, why did she return to it? If you let out a dove between this and Boulogne, you will find that it will fly to the nearest dry land, probably to its own dovecote, as carrier-pigeons, it is well known, do. If this flood had not been universal, when the dove was let out, with its immense rapidity of wing, it would have soon reached that part of the globe that was not covered by the flood; but she "found no rest for the sole of her foot:" and the presumption, therefore, is, that the whole face of the earth was covered by this deluge.—*(Dr. Cumming.)*

1. The first difficulty in the way of supposing the flood to have been literally universal, is the great quantity of water that would have been requisite.

2. A second objection to such a universality is, the difficulty of providing for the animals in the ark.

3. The third and most important objection to this universality of the deluge is derived from the facts brought to light by modern science, respecting the distribution of animals and plants on the globe.—*(Hitchcock.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6—12.

THE JUDICIOUS CONDUCT OF A GOOD MAN IN SEEKING TO ASCERTAIN THE FACTS OF LIFE, AND HIS RELATION THERETO.

We observe :—

I. **That Noah did not exhibit an impetuous haste to get out of the circumstances in which God had placed him.** Noah had now been shut up in the ark for a long time, and yet he does not give way to complaining language, but calmly waits the day of his deliverance. That day advanced in definite stages ; the fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven were closed, the waters returned from off the earth ; then the ark rested on the mountain, and the waters gradually decreased until the tops of the mountains were seen, and Noah was permitted to step out on dry land. And this is the ordinary way of life ; men are gradually released from their troubles, and given, step by step, to see the purpose of God concerning them. They do not see the dry land all at once, upon the first outlook from the ark ; they have to wait for it many days. The waiting is a sacred discipline, and the effort to ascertain the facts of the case and the Divine providence in reference thereto, is strengthening to the soul. It is very important that our conduct should be wise and calm during the last days of trial, as indiscretion then may have a most calamitous effect upon our after life, and may mar the effect of former patience. Some men are very impetuous ; they are always seeking a change of condition and circumstance ; and consequently they often get out of the ark in which they are located before the waters have wholly subsided, and thus injury befals them. Men should never be in a hurry to betake themselves from positions in which God has placed them, even though they may be uncomfortable ; the proper time of release will come, and then they will be safe in availing themselves of it.

1. *We see that God does sometimes place men in unwelcome positions.* The ark would not be a very welcome habitation to Noah. He would very likely, had he been consulted, have preferred another method of safety from the deluge. But there are times when God selects a man's circumstances for him, often uncomfortable, but always full of rich mercy. There are multitudes of good men to-day living and toiling in unfavourable spheres, which they would fain leave, but which they retain under a consciousness of duty. They are remaining in the ark till God shall give them permission to leave it.

2. *That when God does place men in unwelcome positions, it is that their own moral welfare may be enhanced.* Noah was placed in the ark for his own safety, and also that he might be an instrument in the hand of Divine providence in the new condition of things after the flood. And so when good men are in circumstances somewhat unfavourable, it is that God's love may be manifested to them, that they receive a holy discipline, and that they may accomplish a ministry of good to those by whom they are surrounded. Men who go into the ark are safe, but they have hard work awaiting them.

3. *That when men are placed in unwelcome positions they should not remove from them without a Divine intimation.* Had some men been in Noah's position they would have got out of the ark when it struck upon the mountain, they would have made no effort to ascertain the Divine will in reference to their lot. God never intends good men to get out of their arks until there is something better for them to step into. They must wait for the dry land.

II. That Noah was thoughtful and judicious in endeavouring to ascertain the will of God in reference to his position in its relation to the changing condition of things.

1. *Noah felt that the time was advancing for a change in his position, and that it would be necessitated by the new facts of life.* Noah was not always to remain in the ark. Good men are not always to continue in their trying and unfavourable circumstances, they have presentiments of better things, and are justified in seeking to realize them in harmony with the Divine will. Some men never dream of bettering their circumstances, they are lethargic spirits, and are content to remain in the ark all their days; they care not to inherit the new world before them. Mere ambition or restlessness should not lead men to alter their method of life or station, but only the providence of God as shown in daily events. When the earth is dry it is folly for a man to remain in the ark. The dry earth is God's call to Noah to come and possess it. Some men never have eyes to behold the opportunity of their lives.

2. *Noah recognised the fact that the change in his position should be preceded by devout thought and precaution.* Before he left the refuge of the ark he made every possible calculation as to the likelihood of the future; he did not irreverently trust himself to the care of a Providence whose blessing he had never sought. He moved in his more welcome sphere of life guided by the will of God. A worthy pattern for all who may be about to change their mode of life.

III. That Noah employed varied and continuous methods of ascertaining the facts of his position and his duty in relation thereto. "And he sent forth a raven, which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from the earth. And he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground."

1. *These methods were varied.* First he sent forth a *raven*, "which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth." Now the raven, being a bird which feeds upon flesh and carrion, must have found plenty of food floating on the waters; and it could have sufficient rest on the bodies of the dead animals: for anyone may have seen a carrion crow standing on a dead animal carried down a mountain stream. Then Noah sent forth the *dove*, which feeds upon seeds and vegetable matter, it was obliged to return. But the second time it returned with the olive leaf in its mouth, which shewed that the waters had very materially subsided, and were within a few feet of the ground. And so men who are seeking a change in their condition of life should employ the best and most varied agencies to ascertain the propriety and opportunity of so doing. One effort may not be reliable. The raven may not return, even if the flood has not subsided. Then try the second, a dove. And if you are honest in the sending forth of these messengers, and in the interpretation of the olive leaf on their return, you need not miss your providential way in life.

2. *These methods were continuous.* "And he stayed yet another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark." You will notice here the interesting fact that Noah waited seven days. This is perhaps an indirect indication of the observance of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a time when men may test the facts of daily life and circumstance.

3. *These methods were appropriate.* Noah employed agencies that were ready to his use, that would be impartial in the service, and whose natural instinct would be an infallible guide. And so when men are testing the important issues of life and circumstance, they should be careful to select the most fitting agencies for so doing. They should not risk so great a result upon an inappropriate or uncertain omen.

IV. That Noah yielded a patient obedience to the test of circumstances which he had employed.—He was patiently obedient to the tests he employed; he did not wantonly reject them or foolishly disobey them. Some men pretend to seek the Divine guidance in the transactions of their lives, and yet they never follow it when opposed to their own inclinations or foregone conclusions. They send out the raven and the dove, and yet get out of the ark upon the dictate of their own impulse. This conduct is profane and perilous.

V. That indications of duty are always given to those who seek them devoutly. The dove returned to Noah with the olive leaf. It is stated by some natural historians, that the olive grew under water in the Red Sea, and bore berries there. Whether this be so or not, it is probable that the olive may live more healthily under a flood than most other trees. It is eminently hardy, and will grow in a favourable soil without care or culture. It is generally a plant of the Mediterranean. Men who seek prayerfully to know their duty in the events of life, will surely have given to them the plain indications of Providence. LESSONS:—1. *That men should not trust their own reason alone to guide them in the events of life.* 2. *That men who wish to know the right path of life should employ the best talents God has given them.* 3. *That honest souls are Divinely led.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 6, 7. God in wisdom sometimes lengthens trials to test the faith and patience of His saints.

Believing saints, though God appears not, will stay contentedly forty days, that is, the time for their salvation. Lawful means believers may use for their comfort, when there is no immediate appearance of God.

Visible experiments of the ceasing of God's wrath may be desired, and used by His people, where the Lord sets no prohibition.

Unclean or the worst of creatures may be of use sometimes to comfort the Church.

Instinct of creatures from God teaches His people of His providence to them.

Verse 8. The dove emblematical of the Holy Ghost. 1. As the dove rested not on the flooded ground so the Holy Spirit will not dwell in an impure heart. 2. As the dove returned in the evening into the ark, so the Spirit in the time of the gospel, which is the evening of the world. 3. As the dove brought an olive leaf whereby Noah knew that the waters were dried, so the Spirit brings comfort and peace to the soul, assuring it that God's judgments are past, their sins being pardoned.

The raven sets forth the wicked in the church who go and come but never effectually dwell there.

Noah sent forth a raven and a dove to bring him intelligence; observe here, that though God had told Noah particularly when the flood would come, even to a day (Ch. vii. 4), yet he did not give him a particular account by revelation at what times and by what steps it should go away. The knowledge of the former was necessary to his preparing the ark; but the knowledge of the latter would serve only to gratify his curiosity, and the concealing it from him would be the needful exercise of his faith and patience. He could not forsee the flood by revelation; but he might by ordinary means discover its decrease, and God was pleased to leave him to use them [*Henry and Scott*].

Believing souls, when means answer not, will wait a longer time.

God's gracious ones in faith use other lawful means if one do fail.

Clean as well as unclean, that which is chosen by God may be used by His Church for its good.

Faith in God's salvation may put souls upon a desire to see it, or to have evidence of it.

God's gracious ones desire the abating of the tokens of the Divine displeasure.

Verse 9. The best means that believers use may not always give them rest.

God's providence in continual tokens of displeasure, may obstruct means of comfort.

It is in such case the work of the saints to take up the means again, in due time to use them.

The dove is an emblem of a gracious soul, that, finding no rest for its foot, no solid peace or satisfaction in this world—this deluged, defiling world—returns to Christ as to its ark, as to its Noah, its rest. The carnal heart, like the raven, takes up with the world, and feeds on the carrion it finds there; but return thou to thy rest, O my soul (Ps. cxvi. 7). O that I had wings like a dove (Ps. lv. 6). And as Noah put forth his hand and took the dove, and pulled her in to him, into the ark, so Christ will graciously preserve, and help, and welcome those that fly to Him for rest [*Henry and Scott*].

Verse 10, 11. God's way of answer, and the waiting of His saints are fitly coupled.

God's gracious ones are of a contented, waiting and hoping frame.

Faith will expect from seven to seven, from week to week, to receive answers of peace from God.

After waiting, faith will make trial of lawful means again and again. It will add messenger to messenger.

Waiting believers shall receive some sweet return by use of means in God's time.

He that sends out for God is most likely to have return from him.

Visible tokens of God's wrath ceasing He is pleased to vouchsafe to His own.

It concerns God's saints to consider His signal discoveries of grace to know them, and gather hope and comfort from them.

The olive branch, which was an emblem of peace, was brought, not by the raven, a bird of prey, nor by a gay and proud peacock, but by a mild, patient, humble dove. It is a dove-like disposition that brings into the soul earnests of rest and joy [*Henry and Scott*].

This olive leaf in the mouth of the dove may set forth :—

1. The grace and peace by Jesus Christ which are brought in the mouth of His ministers.

2. The dove returned at first without her errand; but sent again she brought better tidings. The man of God must not only be "apt to teach," but "patient, in meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves; proving, if at any time, God will give them repentance" [*Trapp*].

The fresh olive leaf was the first sign of the resurrection of the earth to new life after the flood, and the dove with the olive leaf a herald of salvation.

Verse 12. The giving of one step of mercy makes God's saints wait for more.

The saint's disposition is to get mercy by trying means, as well as to wait for it.

In the withholding of return of means may be the return of mercy. Though the dove stay, yet mercy cometh.

Providence promotes the comforts of saints when he seems to stop them.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13—19.

MAN'S GOING FORTH AFTER THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD.

I. That he goes forth upon the Divine command. "And God spake unto Noah, saying, go forth of the ark, thou and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee." 1. *That Noah was councilled to go forth from the ark on a day ever to be remembered.* "And it came to pass in the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth." Men should always keep the chronology of their moral life, the days of deliverance from unwelcome circumstances should be carefully remembered; this will aid the gratitude of the soul. Every great soul has its calendar of progress. There are some days men can never forget. The day on which Noah came out of the ark would be an immortal memory. 2. *That Noah was commanded to go out from the ark when the earth was dry.* God never commands a man to leave his refuge or his circumstances under conditions that would render it indiscreet to do so. He waits till all is ready, and at the most fitting moment tells the good man to go forth from his hiding place into the new sphere of activity. Men should not step out of the ark until the earth is dry enough to receive them, and then only at the call of God.

II. That he goes forth in reflective spirit. We can readily imagine that Noah would go forth from the ark in very reflective and somewhat pensive mood. 1. *He would think of the multitudes who had been drowned in the great waters.* As he stepped out of the ark and his eye only rested on his own little family as the occupants of the earth, his heart would be grieved to think of the multitudes who had been destroyed by the deluge. True he was glad to escape from the close confinement of the ark, but his own joy would be rendered pensive by the devastation everywhere apparent. And when the judgments of God upon the wicked are observed in the earth, it is fitting that men should be thoughtful. 2. *He would think of his own immediate conduct of life, and of the future before him.* When Noah came forth from the ark, he stood in a world destitute of inhabitants, and equally destitute of seed and harvest. He would have to engage in the work of cultivating the soil and in providing for the needs of the future. He is now entering upon an anxious and laborious life. How few men truly realize that the future of the world depends upon their industry. The once solitary husbandman is now forgotten in the crowd of those who culture the earth.

III. That he goes forth in company with those who have shared his safety. 1. *He goes forth in company with the relatives of his own family.* "Go forth of the ark, thou and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee." God permitted the family of Noah to be with him in the ark, to relieve his solitude, to aid his efforts, to show the protective influence of true piety; and now they are to join him in the possession of the regenerated earth, that they may enjoy its safety, and aid its cultivation. 2. *He goes forth in company with the life-giving agencies of the universe.* "Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth; after their kinds went forth out of the ark." And thus this motley and miscellaneous crowd came out of the ark to fill creation with its usual life.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

NOAH'S FIRST CONSCIOUSNESS OF SAFETY AFTER THE DELUGE.

Verse 13. Now, it is somewhat natural, and it may not be either uninteresting or unprofitable, to speculate concerning Noah's impression on his first out-look upon "the face of the ground that was dry."

I. **He would, probably, be impressed with the Greatness of the Calamity he had Escaped.** The roaring waters had subsided, but they had wrought a terrible desolation, they had reduced the earth to a vast charnel house; every living voice is hushed, and all is silent as the grave. The Patriarch perhaps would feel two things in relation to this calamity. 1. *That it was the result of sin.* 2. *That it was only a faint type of the final judgment.*

II. **He would probably be impressed with the Efficacy of the Remedial Expedient.** How would he admire the ark that had so nobly battled with the billows and so safely weathered the storm? 1. *This expedient was Divine.* Christianity, the great expedient for saving souls from the deluge of moral evil, is God's plan. "What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh" Philosophy exhausted itself in the trial. 2. *This expedient alone was effective.* When the dreadful storm came we may rest assured that every one of that terror-stricken generation would seize some scheme to rescue him from the doom.

There is no other name, &c. 3. *The expedient was only effective to those who committed themselves to it.*

III. He would probably be impressed with the wisdom of his faith in God. He felt now: 1. That it was wiser to believe in the word of God, than to trust *to the conclusions of his own reason.* He might have reasoned from the mercy of God, and the general experience of mankind, that such an event as the deluge would never have happened; but he trusted in God's *word.* 2. *That it was wiser to believe in the Word of God, than to trust to the uniformity of nature.* 3. That it was wiser to believe in God's Word, than to trust *to the current opinion of his contemporaries.* Now, will not the feeling of the good man when he first enters heaven, correspond in some measure with the feelings of Noah on the occasion when he first looked from his ark, saw the face of the "dry ground," and felt that he was safe! Will there not be a similar impression of the tremendous calamity that has been escaped! Will not the sainted spirit, as it feels itself safe in the celestial state, reflect with ordinary gratitude upon that deluge of sin and suffering from which it has been for ever delivered. *(Homilist.)*

As the flood commenced on the 17th of the second month of the 600th year of Noah's life, and ended on the 27th of the second month of the 601st year, it lasted a year and ten days; but whether a solar year of 360 or 365 days, or a lunar year of 352, is doubtful [*Keil and Delitzsch*].

As times of special mercy are recorded by God; so they should be remembered by the Church.

At His appointed periods God measures out mercy unto his Church.

The patient waiting of the saints would God have recorded as well as his own mercy.

As mercies move God's Church, so He moveth His saints to remove the vail, and to meet them.

Several periods of time God takes to perfect salvation to His Church.

Verse 14—17. After their patient waiting God will certainly speak to His saints.

God speaks not doubtfully but certainly to His people in His returns.

God Himself must speak unto the satisfying of His saints in reference to their conduct.

Upon the change of Providence, God speaks change of duty to His saints.

It is at God's pleasure to ordain or lay aside external means of man's salvation.

God's promise is completely good unto His Church for saving.

Propagation, and increase of creatures on earth, is God's blessing for His Church.

Verses 18, 19. God's command and saint's obedience must be found to bring about their comfort.

It becometh saints to make their outgoings and incomings only upon the Word of God.

Providence appoints and maintains order in the moving of His creatures; but especially in His Church.

Admirable is the work of Providence upon brutes to keep them in order.

The motion of the brute is at the Word of God to go in and out for safety

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 20—22.

THE DEVOUT CONDUCT OF A GOOD MAN AFTER A SPECIAL DELIVERANCE FROM EMINENT DANGER.

I. That Noah gratefully acknowledged his deliverance as from God. True, Noah had built the ark, and might have taken much credit to himself for so doing. He might have considered this an important element in his preservation from the waters of the deluge. And in contemplation of his own effort he might have lost sight of the Divine providence over him. How many men after a period of especial deliverance from peril, magnify their own forethought, their own skill; they almost entirely forget the aid which heaven has rendered them, and without which they could not have escaped the common doom. Such conduct is most ungrateful, and those who are guilty of it show themselves unworthy of the help they have received. The truly grateful soul will always acknowledge the deliverances of life as from the loving care of God. He only can save men from the deluge occasioned by sin.

II. That Noah devoutly offered to God a Sacrifice in token of his deliverance. Noah built an altar for burnt sacrifice, to thank God for gracious protection and to pray for his mercy to come. This is the first altar mentioned in history. The sons of Adam had built no altar for their offerings, because God was still present on the earth in Paradise, so that they could turn their offerings and hearts toward that abode. But with the flood God had swept Paradise away, withdrawn the place of His presence, and set up His throne in heaven, from which he would henceforth reveal himself to man (chap. xi. 5—7). In future, therefore, the hearts of the pious had to be turned towards heaven, and their offerings and prayers needed to ascend on high if they were to reach the throne of God." 1. *This sacrifice was the natural outcome of Noah's gratitude.* Noah had been commanded to do everything else connected with his wondrous deliverance; he was commanded to build the ark, and was given the pattern after which he was to construct it; was told who were to occupy it, and when he was to leave it. But no command was issued in reference to the offering of this sacrifice; that was left to the judgment and moral inclination of the patriarch. A truly grateful soul has no need to be told to offer a suitable sacrifice to God upon deliverance from danger. 2. *This sacrifice was not precluded by any excuse consequent upon the circumstances of Noah.* Noah did not give way to excessive grief at the destruction wrought by the waters, and so delay his devotion till his sorrow was assuaged. He did not excuse himself upon the ground that his resources were scanty, and that therefore he would wait till his wealth was augmented before he would sacrifice to the Lord, and that then he would offer a sacrifice worthy the occasion. Noah offered according to his circumstances and did not allow any duty to take precedence of this. He did not indulge the joy of triumph so as to forget the claims of God upon him. He was a true man, alike in sorrow as in success. He showed himself worthy to be entrusted with the care of the new world.

III. That the sacrifice of Noah was acceptable to God and preventive of further evil to the world. 1. *It was fragrant.* "And the Lord smelled a sweet savour." He was propitiated. He had respect to the offering. It was welcome to him as the outcome of a grateful soul, and as emblematical of a sacrifice in the days to come, which would come up before Him as a "sweet smelling savour." 2. *It was preventive of calamity.* "And the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every living thing, as I have done." The more we sacrifice to God the safer we become in our circumstances of life. Sacrifice is wisdom. If God were to destroy the world on account of the sin of man, it would never exhibit leaf or fruit, it would be seldom free from the angry waters of deluge. 3. *It was preservative of the natural agencies of the universe.* "While the earth remaineth seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." There is a close connection between the sacrifices of the good and the fruitful springs of the universe. Devotion of soul is allied to the constancy of nature more than we imagine. The world's Noahs are allied to the world's seed time and harvest. **What sacrifice have we offered to God for our many deliverances through life?**

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

NOAH'S OFFERING ON COMING FORTH FROM THE ARK, AND ITS RESULTS.

Verses 21, 22. **I. The occasion on which this offering was made.** It was no ordinary occasion. During the sixteen hundred and fifty years in which the world had existed, there had been no such manifestation of the Divine character as this family had seen. 1. *On this occasion how impressively would Noah and his family be reminded of the Divine forbearance which had been displayed to the whole world.* There had been since the Fall a gradual unfolding of the scheme of mercy in the institution of sacrifice, the preaching of the patriarchs, and the teaching of the Spirit. 2. *With what solemn awe would Noah and his family now view the earth bearing on every part of its surface the marks of recent vengeance.* When they entered the ark the earth was smiling with plenty and thickly populated; now all are gone. They are the sole remnant of the human population. 3. *With what adoring and grateful feeling would Noah and his family view their own preservation on this occasion.* Singled out by Divine mercy, preserved by Divine power, directed by Divine wisdom, they had built the ark in which they had been preserved, while all around was destroyed.

II. In its Nature. 1. *An expression of gratitude.* It was his first act. He stayed not to build a habitation for himself. His stock was small, yet he took the best of his flock. 2. *An acknowledgment of dependence.* Noah remembered his recent preservation, and in his offering expressed his confidence that He who had preserved him under such circumstances would still continue to provide for his safety. 3. *The offering of Noah was a lively exhibition of his faith in the future atonement as well as an appropriate testimony that his recent preservation was owing to the efficacy of that atonement.*

III. In its results. 1. *The offering was accepted.* 2. *The promise which was given.* 3. *The covenant which was made* [*Sketches of Sermons by Wesleyan Ministers*].

Obedience and sacrifice are sweetly set together by God, and kept together by saints.

The first work due to God's salvation is the setting up of His worship in truth.

The saints in faith built altars and brought sacrifices to God upon His word.

God would have but one altar at a time in the place which he should choose.

Altar and sacrifice worship is most requisite for sinners to come to God. Therefore Christ is both for propitiation.

1. A believing priest.
2. A sanctified altar.
3. A clean sacrifice.
4. A type of Christ.

The sacrifice which God accepts must ascend and come up to Him, to be available.

The sacrifice which brings peace to man, giveth glory to God.

Verse 22. God pleased in Christ is resolved in heart, and promises to do good unto His people.

The sons of Adam are from birth evil in their principles to high provocations.

Grace in God's covenant glories over sin and will overcome it.

Sinners may be exempt from one kind of punishment, though not from all.

The seasons: 1. Secured by covenant. 2. While the earth remains. 3. Varied in fertility.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VIII.

BY THE

REV. WM. ADAMSON.

Longings! Ver. 1. As prisoners in castles look out of their grated windows at the smiling landscape, where the sun comes and goes; as we, from this life, as from dungeon bars, look forth to the heavenly land, and are refreshed with sweet visions of the home that shall be ours when we are free. And no doubt the longings of Noah and his family were intensely deep for the hour when once more they could leave their floating prison to rest beneath sunny skies, and to ramble amid verdant fields. So does the new creature groan and travail in pain for the moment when it shall be freed from this body of death, and rest upon the sunny slopes of the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. But patience! and thine eyes shall see, not in a swift glance cast, but for eternity, the land that is far off:—

"Yes! though the land be very far away,
A step, a moment, ends the toil, for thee;
Then changing grief for gladness, night for day,
Thine eyes shall see."—*Havergal.*

Judgments! Ver. 5. After the tossings cease the window is opened, and the tops of the mountains are seen. Its light shines in from the new world. What is at first seen appears isolated. The waters still only permit glimpses, unconnected glimpses of the coming new earth. Yet there it is; and the hill tops are pledges of untold and unknown scenes of future joy. For many a day Noah, the spiritual man, has been shut up; but now the floods of regenerating judgment assuage, and the light breaks in. Now the new man belongs to the new creation; for the old man and his monstrous progeny are destroyed, and—

"Mercy's voice
Is now heard pleading in the ear of God."

Safety! Ver. 1. A ship was sailing in the Northern Sea, with wind and tide and surface current all against her. She was unable to make way. In this emergency the captain observed a majestic iceberg moving slowly and steadily in the very direction he desired to take. Perceiving that there was an undercurrent far below the surface, and acting on the extended base of the iceberg, he fastened his vessel to the mass of ice, and was carried surely and safely on his course against the wind and wave. Noah anchored his ark to the Providence of God. No sails were unfurled to the breeze, no oars were unshipped to move the lumbering ark, no rudder was employed to steer. The Providence of God was deeper than the winds and wave and contrary current; and to that, he fastened his barque with the strong cable of faith. Hence the security of the ark with its living freight:—

"Let cold-mouthed Boreas, or the hot-mouthed East,
Blow till they burst with spite;
All this may well confront, all this shall ne'er confound me."—*Quarles.*

Protection! Ver. 4. Years ago, one of our fleets was terribly shattered by a violent gale. It was found that one of the ships was unaffected by the fierce tumult and commotion. Why? Because it was in what mariners designate so forcibly "the eye of the storm." Noah was so situated. While all was desolation, he was safe. The storm of wind and rain and watery floods might toss and roar and leap; Noah's ark was at rest—safe in "the eye of the storm." And just as the ship's compass is so adjusted as to keep its level amidst all the heavings of the sea; so the heaven-built structure was calm amid encircling billows. Amid the fluctuations of the sea of life, the Christian soul remains undisturbed—calm amid tumultuous motion—in "the eye of the storm."

"Leave then thy foolish ranges,
For none can thee secure
But One who never changes,
Thy God, thy life, thy cure."

Security! Ver. 6. When Alexander the Great was asked how he could sleep so soundly and securely in the midst of surrounding danger, he replied that he might well repose when Parmenis watched. Noah might well be in peace, since God had him in charge. A gentleman, crossing a dreary moor, came upon a cottage. When about to leave, he said to its occupant, "Are you not afraid to live in this lonely place?" To this the man at once responded, "Oh! no, for faith closes the door at night, and mercy opens it in the morning." Thus was Noah kept during the long night of the deluge; and mercy opened the door for him.

"Heaven closed its windows, and the deep
Restrained its fountains, while the arid winds
Swept o'er the floods."—*Bickersteth.*

Teachers! Ver. 6. Each of God's saints writes a model minister, is sent into the world to prove some part of the Divine character. One is sent to live in the valley of ease—having much rest, and hearing sweet birds of promise singing in his ears—to prove the love of God in sweet communings. Another is called to stand where the thunder clouds brew—where the lightnings play, and where the tempestuous winds are howling on the mountain tops—to prove the power and majesty of God to keep from all harm, and preserve amid all peril. Thus:—

"God sends His teachers into every age,
To every clime, and every race of men,
With revelations fitted to their growth."—*Lowell.*

Raven! Ver. 7. 1. Some have likened this bird to the law, which can tell no tale of comfort—which leaves the soul in the deepest cells of uttermost despair, and which pays no soothing visit. 2. Others have compared this bird with the worldling, to whom the Gospel ark is not a welcome home—who is carried away by the wild desires and raging lusts—who wanders to and fro, and never settles, and who feed upon the putrid remnants of sin, the carrion of loathsome pleasures. 3. Others again have regarded this gloomy bird and its instincts as a type of the old nature in the Christian, for of the impure a remnant still exists in the saintly heart. Thus the raven, finding its food in carrion, figures those inclinations, writes Jukes, which feed of dead things. The ark does not change the raven; so the Cross may restrain, but does not alter impure desires.

Dove! Ver. 8. The Mandan Indians have an annual ceremony held round a "big canoe" which is of singular interest. The ceremony is called "the settling of the waters;" and it is held always on the day in which the willow trees of their country come into blossom. The reason why they select this tree is that the bird flew to their ancestors in the "big canoe" when the waters were settling, with a branch of it in its mouth. This bird is the dove, which is held so sacred among them that neither man, woman, nor child would injure it. Indeed, the Mandans declare that even their dogs instinctively respect the dove.

"Sweet dove! the softest, steadiest plume
In all the sunbright sky,
Bright'ning in ever-changeful bloom,
As breezes change on high."

Olive Tree! Ver. 11. This may justly be considered one of the most valuable gifts which the beneficent Creator has bestowed upon the human family—and in its various and important uses, we may discover the true reason why the dove was directed by God to select the olive leaf from the countless variety which bestrewed the shiny tops and declivities of Ararat—as the chosen symbol of returning health and life, vigour and strength, fertility and fruitfulness.

"For in a kindly soil it strikes its root,
And flourisheth, and bringeth forth abundant fruit."—*Southey.*

Ark-rest! Ver. 8. Noah's dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, though the raven did. But his foothold—decay and death—would not suit her; so, whirling round and round, at last she returned to the ark. The needle in the compass never stands still, but quivers and trembles and flutters until it comes right against the north. The wise men of the East never found rest until they were right beneath where the star gleamed. So the soul can enjoy no true and fixed repose till it enters into Christ, the true ark; and all its tossings and agitations are but so many wings to carry it hither and thither, that it may find rest. As Augustine says: "Thou, O God, hast created us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." Therefore the soul that seeks rest elsewhere,

"Oh! but it walks a weary round,
And follows a sad dance."—*Manson.*

Dove-voices! Ver. 8. A young man who had been piously brought up, but who had given himself up to every kind of vice and folly, at last joined himself to a company of pirates. A voice—soft and gentle as a mother's—seemed to be always pleading with him. It was the plaintive, appealing "coo-oo" of the dove. Wherever he went, there he heard the "home-call." One night, when the crew had landed amid the lovely forest scenery of a West Indian island, he heard the "dove-voices" amid the tropical vegetation. The tender, reproachful murmer seemed to pierce him through his very heart. He fell on his knees in deep contrition of soul; and the same dove who had called him to penitence, called him to peace.

"For back He came from heaven's gate,
And brought—that Dove so mild—
From the Father in heaven, who hears Him speak,
A blessing for His child."—*Bremer.*

Olive Leaf! Ver. 11. There is one still for the family of God in the ark of His Church floating on the troublous waters of the world. For ages the weary cry of the people of God, waiting and watching for the final deliverance, has gone up: How long, O Lord? The Dove—the Holy Spirit—bears to us the olive-leaf: I will come again, and receive you to myself. The raven—*i.e.*, human reason—does not bring this emblem of hope; but the Heavenly Comforter—

"Oh! who could bear life's stormy doom,
Did not Thy Heavenly Dove
Come brightly bearing through the gloom,
A peace-branch from above!"—*Moore.*

Dove-lessons! Ver. 9. Doves have been trained to fly from place to place, carrying letters in a basket, fastened to their necks or feet. They are swift of flight; but our prayers and sighs are swifter, for they take but a moment to pass from earth to heaven, and bear the troubles of our heart to the heart of God. As Gotthold says, these messengers wing their way, and in defiance of all obstacles they report to the Omniscient the affliction of the victim, and bring back to him the Divine consolation. And yet not always at once; for Noah sent his messenger out more than once ere the message of peace and prosperity was brought back. The dove—

"A second time returning to her rest,
Brought in her mouth a tender olive-leaf—
Emblem of peace."

Olive-Symbol! Ver. 11. The celebrated Captain Cook found that green branches—carried in the hands, or stuck in the ground—were the emblems of peace universally employed and understood by the numerous and untutored inhabitants of the South Sea Islands. Turner mentions that one day, when he and others were backing out into deep water to get clear of some shallow coral-patches, and to look for a better passage for their boat, the natives on the shore—thinking they were afraid—ran and broke off branches from the trees, and waved them above their heads in token of peace and friendship. The cruel natives of Melanesia used this as a means of decoying the missionary Bishop Pattison ashore to be murdered. And hence the people of Israel were commanded to construct their booths at the Feast of Tabernacles partly with branches of olive. All the civilized nations of the world were secretly directed by the overruling Providence of Heaven, writes Paxton to bear them in their hands as emblems of peace and amity.

Dove-Symbol! Ver. 11. Bishop Lake says that the early fathers observed the allegory which Peter makes in comparing Noah's ark unto the Church. They considered that as the dove brought the olive branch into the ark, in token that the deluge had ceased, even so the dove, which lighted upon Christ, brought the glad tidings of the Gospel, that other ark—

"Like Noah's, cast upon the stormy floods,
But sheltering One who gave His life for man."

Deluge! Ver. 13. This narrative has encountered countless and incisive criticism. The enemies of truth have gathered about it. They have marshalled all their forces. They have looked from a distance upon its palaces and towers. Sceptical scientists have said: "We will undermine these chapters with adverse criticism on the possibility of such a deluge. We will prove that its foundations are a mere shell—that within is but a bed of quicksand." Thus have they toiled to shatter Noah's ark for centuries; but it still remains intact; and though it is not true that the material fabric remains undecayed on the summit of inaccessible Ararat, yet it is gloriously true that the moral structure stands fixed and sure on the towering summit of Divine Truth:—

"Grounded on Ararat, whose lofty peaks,
Soon from the tide emerged."

Freedom! Ver. 17. When the door of the ark was thrown open what a joyous bursting forth there was! The strong eagle spread his wings and soared upward from the place of his long captivity. The lordly tiger, who had crouched in tameness and quiet through those long months, bounded with a sudden roar into thickets among the hills. The beasts of the field and the birds of the air followed—each in its own way. They had entered by two and two—by seven and seven, in order and method; but doubtless they came out in a different manner—swift—eager—delighted.

"Till all the plume-dark air,
And rude resounding shore were one wild cry.
—*Anonymous.*

How will the bodies of the saints bound from the ark of the grave! How will their spirits spring with inconceivable gladness, when the door is opened, and they are bidden to "enter into the joy of their Lord!"

Spiritual Truth! Ver. 13. Gather off your beech-trees in the budding spring days a little brown shell in which lies tender green leafage, and if you will carefully strip it, you will find packed in a compass that might almost go through the eye of a needle the whole of that which afterwards in the sunshine is to spread and grow to the yellow green foliage which delights and freshens the eye. In this mysterious incident of the Deluge are folded up all the future purposes of Jehovah in the destiny of the world—all the fruitful lessons of grace and goodness to be taught to the future generations of the church, and all the figurative symbolism bearing upon the many-sidedness of the great salvation of the Son of God:—

"Ours by His eternal purpose ere the universe had place;
Ours by everlasting covenant, ours by free and royal grace."

Liberty! Ver. 18. Up to this point, Noah was a prisoner of hope—secure, yet still a prisoner. When through grace the sinner has passed the judgment of the first creation, and has felt the tossings cease, and then has seen the hill-tops, and received the olive-leaf from the mouth of the gentle Dove, his freedom is near. Many a conscientious doubt as to rules or times or places is now resolved for us. Then Noah and his sons,

"With living tribes innumerous, beasts and birds,
Forth from the ark came flocking."

Acceptance! Ver. 21. As Abel came with the appointed lamb, and was accepted; so Noah came with his sacrifice, and his service was grateful incense. Both offerings teach that there is a virtue in the death of Christ so precious and so mighty that it has resistless power with God. To use the expressive language of Law, "the curtains of God's pavilion are here thrown back, and each attribute appears rejoicing in redemption." The Spirit says that the Lord smelled a sweet savour—that clouds of prevailing odours pierced the skies. Its flame was a light to pious pilgrims in patriarchal times, and after the lapse of centuries it contributes this diamond-radiance to us; when as of old—

"The smoke of sacrifice arose, and God
Smell'd a sweet savour of obedient faith."

CHAPTER IX.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. God]** Heb. *Elohim.* **Blessed]** Similar to the blessing pronounced upon Adam and Eve (Gen. i. 28.—**2. The fear of you, and the dread of you]** The fear of you, as existing in the inferior animals. "Dread" imparts a greater intensity of meaning into the word—the fear which paralyses. It may be that even in Paradise the lower animals had a wholesome fear of man, by means of which they could be kept in subjection. Now they are to be ruled by force and terror.—**3. Every moving thing that liveth]** This form of permission forbids the using of any animal that hath died of itself.—**4. But the flesh with the life thereof]** Some suppose that it is hereby intended to forbid the cruel custom of some ancient nations in tearing off the flesh from living animals. But this was the practice of later heathenism, and it is therefore more probable that we have here a command that the blood of animals must first be shed before they can be used for food. This prohibition was also made to serve the purpose of educating the people to the idea of the sacredness of blood as a means of atonement (Lev. xvii. 11; Heb. ix. 22).—**Life.]** The animating principle—the animal soul. The blood is regarded as the basis of life (Deut. xii. 23). "The blood is the fluid-nerve: the nerve is the constructed blood" *(Lange).* "He disgorges the crimson tide of life" *(Virgil), Æn.* IX., 348.—**5. Your blood of your lives]** LXX. has "blood of your souls"—the blood which contains the life or animal principle.—**Require]** *i.e.*, judicially, in the sense of making "inquisition for;" same verb used in Psa. ix. 12.—**At the hand of every beast]** They have no right to human flesh, and men are to avenge the injuries they suffer from them. Hence their extermination is justifiable for the protection of human life. —**Every man's brother]** Heb. "Of every man, his brother." Society was thus permitted to inflict punishment for the highest wrongs against itself. Every man was to see in every other a brother, which recognition would give an awful significance to the crime of murder. Some consider that the duty of blood-vengeance is thus laid upon the next of kin; but this sprang up in later times, and it is better to take the words as laying down the *principle* of all such punishments.—**Life of man]** *Man* is emphatic.—**6. By man]** This would seem to denote the instrument of the action, yet the Hebrew has a special phrase to indicate such a meaning, in that case using the expression "by the hand of man." It is more probable that the preposition denotes *substitution* "in the place of man," "life for life." Thus 2 Sam. xiv. 7, "For the soul (the life, or in place of) his brother." The LXX has (ver. 6) "in return for his blood." The Targum of Onkelos has "by the witnesses according to the word of judgment."—**9. My covenant]** Usually means a compact made between two parties, delivered in solemn form, and requiring mutual engagements. As employed in Scripture, from the nature of the case, it must also be extended to mean God's *promise* by which He binds Himself to His creatures without terms, absolutely (Jer. xxxiii. 20; Ex. xxxiv. 10). Gesenius derives the term from the verb "to cut," as it is a Hebrew phrase "to cut a covenant," and it was customary for the purpose of ratifying such to divide an animal into parts. Others derive it from the verb "to eat together," thus explaining the phrase "covenant of salt." By others it is referred to purifying (Mal. iii. 2).—**13. I do set]** Heb. "I give—constitute—appoint."—**My bow]** This implies that the bow previously existed, but was now appointed as the sign of the covenant. It was already a symbol of constancy in nature. The rainbow is used in Scripture as the symbol of grace returning after wrath (Ez. i. 27, 28; Rev. iv. 3; x. 1).—**Token].** Some appointed object put before two parties for the purpose of causing them mutually to remember (Gen. xxxi. 48, 52). **14. When I bring a cloud]** Heb. "In clouding a cloud," denoting intensity. A probable reference to the violent showers of the eastern world, issuing from thickly congregated clouds; on which dark ground the rainbow would appear.—**16. The everlasting covenant]** Heb. "The covenant of eternity."—**17. Token of the covenant]** The Hebrew word is not used of *miraculous* signs. Any permanent object would serve. A memorial was all that was required.—**18. Shem, and Ham, and Japheth]** See Critical Notes, ch. v. Japheth was the eldest; but Shem is named first, as being the family whence the Messiah was to spring.—**Ham]** So named, probably, from his children occupying the torrid regions. The name is applied to Egypt; and in the Coptic signifies blackness, as well as heat.—**Japheth]** Signifies spreading. He was the father of the largest portion of the human family, Celtic, Persian, Grecian, German—occupying the northern part of Asia, and all Europe.—**Ham is the father of Canaan]** Mentioned to draw attention to the fact that Ham was cursed in his family, not specially in himself. The sacred historian appends such notices, as reading the prophetic word by the light of subsequent history. It was also necessary to show how the curse of God rested upon the Canaanites.—**19. Overspread]** Heb. "divided," or "dispersed." They were the progenitors of those who divided the whole earth for a habitation.—**20. And Noah began to be a husbandman]** Heb. The man *of the ground.* Like the Gr. γεωργος, and the Lat. *Agricola.* As the Heb. has the article, the meaning is conveyed that such had been his occupation, and it is now resumed after the interruption of the flood.—**Planted a vineyard]** The first mention of the culture of the grape. This was well known to have been the chief occupation of the Western Asiatics, chiefly Syria and Palestine.—**21. He was uncovered]** More accurately, "he uncovered himself." Intoxication made him careless regarding the ordinary provisions for preserving modesty. —22 **Told his brethren without]** Outside the tent.—24. **And knew]** The particular word used implies that he had this knowledge of himself, and not from the information of others. He became sensible of his condition.—**His younger son]** Heb "His son, the little." Some consider that Shem was the youngest, as Ham is second in the list in five other places But here, the order of the names is no certain guide; because it was customary to arrange names according to their rhythm, or sound Others say that the order of the names is determined by their importance and moral nobility as factors in fulfilling the purpose of God The most likely meaning is, that Ham was the "little one" distinctively, *i e.*, the youngest of all.—**Had done unto him]** Heb. "A thing which" The expression implies something more than carelessness or omission, and suggests the idea of some positive act of shame or abuse.—25. **Cursed be Canaan]** "Ham is punished in his sons, because he sinned as a son; and Canaan, because Canaan followed most closely in his father's footsteps." Noah fixes his prophetic eye upon this people as the most powerful and persistent enemies of Israel.—**Servant of servants]** A Hebraism to denote extreme degradation—a state of slavery. "Hewers of wood, and drawers of water" (Josh. ix. 23), refers to their complete subjugation in the days of Joshua and Solomon.—26. **Blessed be the Lord God of Shem]** Heb. "Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Shem." "If Jehovah is the God of Shem, then is Shem the recipient and the heir of all the blessings of salvation which God, as Jehovah, procures for humanity."—*Keil.* Shem has the redeeming *name* of God —**Canaan shall be his servant]** Heb. "Servant to them." Referring to those who should descend from Shem. Fulfilled when Israel conquered Canaan, extirpated the greater part of the inhabitants, and reduced the remnant to entire subjection. The great obstacle to the family of Shem in the time of Abraham was the Canaanite (Gen. xii. 6).—27. **God shall enlarge Japheth]** Lange renders it, "God give enlargment to the one who spreads abroad." The word signifies to make room for, or give space for outspreading. Keil understands it metaphorically, as denoting happiness or prosperity. Bringing into a "large place" is an image frequently employed in the Psalms and other places. to express a state of joy (Psa. cxviii. 5; 2 Sam. xxii 20). But the more literal interpretation is probably the true one. Japheth was to spread out through the earth, to have the colonising spirit. **And he shall dwell in the tents of Shem]**—The chief Jewish authorities, with others, make Elohim the subject of the verb, and with sufficient reason. as there is no necessity for a new grammatical subject. It is more natural to interpret the words as describing *two* acts of God. He (God) will *enlarge* Japheth, but He will *dwell* in the tents of Shem. This view gives a more spiritual significance to the prophecy. Shem was the *habitation* of God. A merely political interpretation fails to satisfy so high a conception.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—7.

The Divine Benediction on the New Humanity.

The human race now starts from a new beginning. Through the Fall the contagion of sin had spread until the Old World had reached a maturity of corruption, and tempted beyond forbearance the vengeance of Heaven. The terrible judgment of the Flood overwhelmed the violence that filled the earth, and destroyed all except the "eight souls who were saved by water." But Mercy at length finds a time for rejoicing and triumph, and those deeds of kindness in which she delights. The Divine benediction, so full of present gifts and of promise, came in answer to pious devotion expressed in an act of sacrifice. The new humanity had acknowledged *sin*, and the necessity of propitiating Him to whom alone man has to render an account. God's blessings are no empty form of words, no pleasing abstractions in which alone philosophic meditation can delight. They are substantial good. God loves, and therefore gives The word of blessing, in ver. 1, is afterwards expanded into gifts and provisions for the new humanity. "God blessed Noah and his sons," and spake unto them in words which represented solid benefits. Here we have blessing in the form of provisions for this new beginning of the human race.

1. **Provision for the Continuity of its Physical Life** (verse 1). Death must still reign until destroyed as the last enemy. Successive generations shall go down to the grave, to be replaced by others who in their turn must submit to the common fate. But while the individual dies, as far as his portion and work in the world are concerned, the race is destined to be immortal. The

stream of human life must flow on throughout the ages, until God shall be pleased to bring in a new order, and the former things be passed away. This continuity of humanity through the wastes of death is to be maintained by the *institution of marriage*. To these progenitors of the new race, God said, as to our first parents, "Be fruitful and multiply." Sexual sin had been the ruin of the old world; but now it shall be seen that lawful connections can be formed and the proper uses of marriage secured. The command to replenish the earth by the multiplication of the species is now given to men who with their "wives" came forth out of the ark. It is therefore a re-affirmation of the sanctity of marriage. This divinely appointed provision for the continuance of man upon the earth.—1. *Raises the relation between the sexes above all degrading associations.* Without the protection and guidance of a divine ordinance, such relations would be chiefly governed by natural instincts. Marriage controls these, and restrains their impetuosity within wholesome bounds. It brings the relation between the sexes under the sanction of God's order, by which it becomes ennobled. Man is thus reminded that moral responsibility belongs to him in all the relations of life. 2. *Tends to promote the stability of society.* Wild and untamed passions, the indulgence of animal instincts without control, will keep any society of men in the lowest possible condition. It is only when the reason and conscience submit to the laws of God that man can exist in stable society, or rise in the family of nations. Men are not to herd together as beasts, they must *live* together, otherwise they debase the dignity of human nature. They cannot form a society possessing strength and nobility, unless they acknowledge that the relations of life rest upon something out of sight. They are ultimately spiritual relations. There is no real progress for man, unless in all the relations of life he acknowledges the will of the Supreme Father. Marriage is the foundation of the family, and the family is the foundation of the State. 3. *Promotes the tender charities of life.* To this ordinance we owe the love of husband and wife, parent and child, and the play of all those affections that make home sacred. Whatever is noble and tender in natural instinct becomes enhanced and permanent when God is acknowledged in all the domestic relations of life.

II. Provision for its sustenance (verse 3). In the history of the human creature the sustenance of life is the first consideration, though not the most important. It is necessary first to live before we can live well. "First that which is natural, and afterwards that which is spiritual," is the order of human progress, as it is the order in which we must supply the wants of our nature. Life is a flame that must be sustained by something outside of itself. No creature can live on its own blood. The physical life of man must be preserved by the ministry of other lives—animal, vegetable. For this end God has given man dominion over the earth, and especially over all other lives in it. We may regard this sustenance which God has provided for man's lower wants (1) *as a reason for gratitude.* Our physical necessities are the most immediate, the most intimate to us. We should acknowledge the hand that provides for them. We should feel how much we are beholden to God for our very life itself, upon which foundation even the highest blessings rest. The order of thought requires that we thank God for our creation and preservation, even before we thank Him for His love to us in Christ Jesus. We may regard God's provision herein (2) *as an example of the law of mediation.* Man's life is preserved by the instrumentality of others. God's natural government of the world is carried on by means of mediation, from which we may infer that such is the principle of His moral government. That "bread of life" by which our souls are sustained comes to us through a Mediator. Thus God's provisions for our common wants may be made a means of educating us in higher things. Nature has the symbols and suggestions of spiritual truths (3) *as a ground for expecting greater blessings.* If God made so rich and varied a provision to supply the necessities of the body, it was reasonable to expect that He would care and provide for the deeper necessities of the soul. Man was made in the image of God, and invested with dominion over the world. He is of the blood-royal of Heaven, and may be permitted to hope for those better things suitable to his high estate. God will surely maintain His own glory in caring for His image. If there be no provision for our souls, then would there be a strange break in the dealings of God with man, and a fatal gulf between Heaven and earth.

III. Provision for its protection. Human life must be protected from dangerous enemies (verses 5, 6). There are evils against which no human foresight can provide, but there are many more from which we have abundant means of defending ourselves. Though the dominion of man over nature has limitations, yet it is real; otherwise man could never have held his place against such tremendous obstacles. It is necessary that our physical life be protected—1. *From the ferocity of animals.* From their numbers and strength, these would be formidable enemies. They increase rapidly and exist in external conditions against which the natural weakness of man could not contend. Their time of utter helplessness in infancy is short, they soon become independent of their fellows, they are provided with clothing and weapons of defence and attack.

> "Hale are their young, from human frailties freed,
> Walk unsustained or unsupported feed;
> Bound o'er the lawn, or seek the distant glade,
> And find a home in each delightful shade."

Man, on the other hand, passes through a long period of weakness and entire dependence upon others, requires artificial clothing to shelter him from the cold. He is not provided by nature with any formidable weapons for his defence; yet subdues all things, captures other animals for his food, compels them to perform his work, or tames them to make him sport. Man, inferior in every physical quality and advantage, reigns over them by his superior reason. The force of intellect, by directing and controlling all other forces, maintains his pre-eminence. The lower animals acknowledge his majesty in fear and dread. The Providence of God preserves the balance of power, in a wonderful manner, between man and the lower animals. Man has the Divine sanction for protecting himself against their ferocity. He is commanded to avenge the life of his fellow upon them. It is lawful for him to seek their extermination, should they become dangerous to his existence. Human life must be held sacred, and its rights vindicated, even when they are invaded by a blind ferocity. 2. *From the violence of evil men.* Sinners were destroyed by the flood, yet sin remained in the human family. The evils of our nature were too deeply seated to be cleansed away even by so dire a judgment. It was contemplated that in this new humanity evil passions would arise, and drive men to deeds of violence against their fellows. God would require, judicially, the blood of man at the hands of him who shed it, and has given authority to man to execute His vengeance. In this permission and command there may be a remembrance of Cain, who did the first murder. The new society must be protected by holding a terrible penalty over murderers. The Bible does not indulge in poetical theories of human nature, but soberly acknowledges all its most terrible facts.

IV. Provision for its Morality. Without morality society cannot be stable, exist in comfort, or make progress. Nations having the highest resources of talent, power, and wealth, have yet been destroyed by their own corruptions. The new humanity must have laws of right conduct, and sufficient penalties to enforce them; else it could not continue in prosperity, or rise to higher things.

The inbred corruption of human nature, its fierce passions, imperfections, and frailties, demanded the restraint of law. Here, however, we have not so much the external command as (what might be called) the material and principle of law. We have the ethics of human conduct not settled into formulated statements, but held in solution. The aim is to attack the evils of society in their roots, to give ennobling views of human nature, and to create a sufficient authority on the side of order and good. 1. *Hence the tendency to cruelty was to be repressed.* They were not to eat the blood of animals. The prohibition was necessary to preserve men from acquiring savage tastes, and practising gross and revolting forms of cruelty. This would be one of the effects of the command to abstain from the use of blood, though it is probable that a higher lesson was intended. All that tends to repress cruelty greatly modifies the evils of depravity, is on the side of goodness, and strengthens the charities of the heart. Cruelty imparts a terrible momentum to evil, until that which is sad and pitiable becomes monstrous and horrible. When men are seized by this demon of cruelty, they go rapidly to the extremest verge of sin and crime. Hence to forbid what may lead to cruelty is a wise provision to preserve morality. 2. *They were to remember the fact of mutual brotherhood.* "At the hand of every man's brother." God was the universal Father, and the human race was His family. Every man was to see in every other a brother. The recognition of this fact would be a fruitful source of goodwill towards all, and a promoter of social order and morality. No deed of violence, cruelty, or wrong could be done where there was a full and real knowledge of this truth. This conviction of our common brotherhood is so disguised, overlaid, and silenced by the depravity within and around us that it is comparatively weak as a restraint on the evils of the world. It can only be clear and come to strength and efficacy when we read it in the light of our Lord's redeeming work. Men cannot have true union with one another until they have union with God through His Son. The hand has no direct connection with the foot, but each is connected with one centre of life. The unity of the body is thus maintained, and so it must be with the members of the human family. There will be no perfect union until they all partake of one spiritual life. Still, the fact of human brotherhood prepares the way for this sublime issue, and helps us to rise to the thought of it. The tie that really binds men together must be *spiritual.* 3. *Morality was to be protected by authority armed with penalties.* (Ver. 6.) Society was empowered to punish crimes committed against itself. The whole community, by means of appointed and responsible persons, must avenge the wrong done to any of the individuals of which it is composed. Here we have the punishment to be inflicted upon those who commit the *highest* offence against society. Hence the origin and use of the civil magistrate. The community should be on the side of right and justice, and against violence and wrong. But, for the sake of convenience, it is necessary that this feeling should be represented and the duties belonging to it carried out by the officers of the law. They represent the authority of God, and the just feeling of society. Nations could not exist with the stability and privileges of civil life without a government strong enough to enforce the laws. The *form* of government is a human ordinance, arising out of the necessities of life and moulded by the events of political history, but the *end* of government is of Divine appointment. By requiring so terrible a penalty from him who sheds the blood of man, God has given His sanction to the office of the civil magistrate. Such deal with offences against morality in the form of crime, or of evils affecting the comfort and well-being of society. In the present condition of mankind, teaching and moral suasion are insufficient to preserve public peace and order. There must be an authority, which is to be feared by evildoers. God sets His seal upon human institutions which have the safety and well-being of mankind for their object. Hence in this new beginning of the race, He directs that men shall protect themselves against all deeds of injustice and violence.

V. Provision for its Religion. Something more must be considered than the safety and prosperity of men regarded as inhabitants of this world. Man needs a *religion*, for he is conscious of relations with a higher world. We have here the outlines of certain religious truths, which compel us to refer the principles of conduct and the foundation of authority ultimately to God. They were also intended to prepare humanity for the superior light of a later revelation. 1. *Mankind were to be educated to the idea of sacrifice.* (Ver. 4.) Blood was forbidden as a separate article of food. Men were to be taught to regard it as a sacred thing, so that they might be prepared for the fact that God had set it apart as the symbol of expiation. The education of humanity is a slow process, and in its earlier stages it was necessary that men should attain to the knowledge of the deep truths of religion by the aid of outward symbols. Pictures and illustrations of truth were suitable to the childhood of the world. Mankind were first to see the form and appearance of truth before they could examine its structure, or know its essence. The sanctity of blood prepared the way for the rites of sacrifice, and sacrifice taught the sinfulness of sin and the necessity of some Divine expedient for restoring man to the favour of God. It also suggested man's superior relation to God and to the spiritual world. If man were not accountable to his Maker when this life is ended, why should he be taught the necessity of being purged from sin? Surely God contemplated a creature who, when he had attained purity, might be fitted to dwell with Himself. 2. *Mankind were to be impressed with the true dignity of human nature.* For the law concerning murder, there is the *moral* sanction arising from the brotherhood of man, but there is also the *religious* sanction founded upon the fact that he was made in the image of God. The sublime truths of revelation must be regarded as extravagant, unless we suppose them addressed to a creature having such dignity. Mankind were to be early impressed with the idea of their high and noble origin in order that they might be prepared for the successive advances of God's kindness. The gifts of God, however great they may be, cannot be unsuitable to a being made in His image. From this fact we gather—1. *That man has the capacity for religion.* The image of God in him is greatly defaced, but it is not destroyed. He has the capacity for knowing God, for understanding his own responsibility, and feeling after the spiritual world. By this he is distinguished from, and placed far above, all other lives on the earth. There is something in man that answers to the voice of God and the suggestions of inspiration. 2. *That man is destined for another life.* To partake of the image of God is to partake of immortality. God, who has made and fashioned us in His likeness,, will have respect to the work of His own hands, and will not suffer us to be destroyed in the grave. 3. *Mankind must be taught to refer all authority and rule ultimately to God.* The civil magistrate was to be invested with authority and power to punish the crime of murder by the infliction of the death penalty. The assigned reason is, man was made in the image of God. Thus all human authority, for its foundation and warrant, is cast ultimately on God. Religion is the life of all progress. Every question concerning the interests of mankind resolves itself, in the end, into a question of religion. Here are the only noble and sufficient impulses, motives, and sanctions of all the activities and aims of human life. Man must realise the full significance of his relations to God, that he might be fitted to occupy his position as the appointed ruler of the world.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. God gives his benediction at every great crisis in the history of mankind. Thus at the creation of man (Gen. i. 28). Even when He sent forth His "fiery law," He loved the people and gave His blessing (Deut. xxxiii. 2, 3). When the Messiah came, the blessing became more definite and plentiful.

At every great epoch of human history, Gods shows some sign of His favour to the race.

God's blessing goes before His commands. Men must have the light of His favour before they can serve Him. Religion would be altogether impossible did not the grace of God go before men and lead the way.

This was the blessing of a Father, for it was spoken to His offspring. Given to rational beings, it implied duties which the righteous Father requires of His children.

God is the source of all paternity. Every society in heaven and earth must acknowledge Him as their origin —their Father. They were begotten by His gracious will (John i. 13).

As the old blessing is repeated, so is the old command to be "fruitful and multiply." God intends a human history, and thus provides for the continuity of the life of the race, without which history would be impossible.

In this text the marriage state is praised and celebrated, since thereout flows not only the order of the family and the world, but also the existence of the Church.—*(Lange.)*

The earth was to be overcome by the diffusion of human life over it. Hence learn the energy of spiritual life, which is a power to conquer and subdue all opposition.

Man's place on earth is appointed by his Heavenly Father, who disdains not to give him direction for the lowest as well as the highest duties; for this world, and that which is to come.

Fruitfulness is another blessing of this stage. Just as in creation, when the third day rose, and the waters were restrained, the earth was made fruitful; so now in Noah, the third great stage in man, the flood being passed, man increases wonderfully. "Except the corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John xii. 24). Now having died to the world by the cross, and the evil fruits which grow out of old Adam being judged by the overflowing waters, the new man within increases yet more. Being purged, he brings forth much fruit.—*(Jukes, Types of Genesis.)*

The greatest desolations in the world cannot hinder God from having a people.—*(Hughes.)*

The grant of increase is the same as at first, but expressed in ampler terms.—*(Murphy.)*

Verse 2. Human reason, fruitful as it is in resources of skill and contrivance, would not by itself secure the complete subjection of the lower animals. Man could not maintain his sovereignty unless they were weakened by dread and felt an awe of his majesty.

It is often God's plan to work by an internal power upon the nature of His creatures as well as by influences from without.

To be compelled to rule by fear was a sign that man was now out of harmony with nature. This is one of the jarring notes of discord which sin has introduced.

Enmity is put between fallen man and all the brute creatures, as well as the serpent. But though they are so greatly superior in strength, their instinct is commonly to flee from the presence of man. If it were not so, how full of terror would man be in new settlements, where civilised society crowds upon the wilderness tribes.—*(Jacobus.)*

"Into your hand are they delivered." Man does not wear an empty title of sovereignty. A real dominion is conveyed to him.

The Scripture everywhere maintains the lordship of man. He is the central figure, all things deriving their worth and excellence from the relations in which they stand to him. Hence the Bible is not a history of external nature, but of man.

This dominion, as granted to the *first* Adam and renewed to Noah, was in itself limited and conditional, such as is fit to grant to sinners. As granted to the *second* Adam, He that is the Lord from heaven, under that man's feet God hath put all things (Heb. ii. 6–9; 1 Cor. xv. 27). This is given to Christ as Mediating Lord, and by Him is sanctified to His members; so the covenant renewed to Noah includes some special blessings in this dominion unto the Church, as it refers to the promised seed, the ground of all God's gracious promises and revelations unto His people.—(*Hughes.*)

God will, as it were, make a covenant for him with the beasts of the field, and they shall be at peace with him, or at least shall be awed by his authority. All this is out of respect to the mediation of Christ, and for the accomplishing of the designs of mercy through Him.—(*Fuller.*)

Verse 3. *Physical* life must be sustained by other lives of flesh and blood; *mental*, by the life of other minds; *spiritual*, by the infusion of the life of God.

God prepares a table for His family. Having granted the greater blessing, He will not withhold the lesser. He who gave life will give all that is necessary for its maintenance.

The daily supply of our common wants is now part of the established order of things. We are in danger of regarding it as a matter of course, and not calling for any special recognition. Yet we should realise the fact that these are gifts of God, and receive them as if they came fresh from His hand. The manna, though it came regularly every day, was yet given from heaven.

By the slaying of animals for food, men would grow familiar with the thought that life is preserved by death. They would be prepared for the doctrine of the atonement, where the death of the Divine victim procures the life of the world.

The grant of sustenance is no longer confined to the vegetable, but extended to the animal kinds, with two solemn restrictions. This explains how fully the animals are handed over to the will of man. They were slain for sacrifice from the earliest times. Whether they were used for food before that time we are not informed. But now *every creeper that is alive* is granted for food. *Every creeper* is every thing that moves with the body prone to the earth, and therefore in a creeping posture. This seems to describe the inferior animals in contradistinction to man, who walks erect. The phrase *that is alive* seems to exclude animals that have died a natural death from being used as food.—(*Murphy.*)

Verse 4. In the largest rights granted to man God reserves something to Himself. He maintains some supreme rights, and grants liberty with wholesome restraints.

It is God's design to invest the seat of life with peculiar sacredness; to encourage that mysterious awe with which all life should be regarded.

The basis of life is still the most perplexing inquiry of philosophy. Human science fails to bridge over the chasm between physical organisms and the facts of volition and consciousness. It would seem that God has thrown around the whole subject the sacredness of mystery.

As the people were to be trained to great leading ideas of sin and salvation by means of these ritual ordinances, so they were to be taught of a special sanctity attaching to *blood* in the system of Divine grace. "For without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. ix. 22). The natural horror of blood which obtains among men is evidence of such a Divine regulation.—(*Jacobus.*)

As life, must the life of the beast go back to God its Creator; or, as life in the victim offered in sacrifice, it must become a symbol that the soul of man belongs to God, though man may partake of the animal materiality, that is, the flesh.—(*Lange.*)

Blood is the *life*, and God seems to claim it as sacred to Himself. Hence, in all the sacrifices the blood was poured out before the Lord: and in the sacrifice of Christ, He shed His blood, or poured out His soul unto death.—*(Fuller.)*

Verse 5. Justice is not a mere abstraction, but a reality in the Divine nature, making demands upon the transgressor which must be satisfied, either by the provisions of grace, or by the exaction of penalty. Justice is made terribly real by the personality of God, the "one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy." (James iv. 12.) "I will require."

The awful punishment for murder proclaims the sacredness of human life.

The principle is here approved that the safety of society must be secured at whatever cost to the individual.

The life of man was to be required judicially at the hands of irrational animals, though they must be ignorant of the moral aspects of their actions. Hence man has the right to exterminate them should it be necessary to the safety and welfare of society.

The civil magistrate is an ordinance of God, not an expedient of man to meet the necessities of society. We have reason to believe that the first ideas of law, order, and civilisation were the result of Divine teaching. Men have never risen from the savage state by any internal power, but have always been helped from without. A boat cannot be propelled by the strength of a man exerted within it —since action is always equal to reaction—the oar must press upon a fulcrum outside of it. In like manner, man, if he will make any progress, must have some fulcrum outside of himself.

This ordinance of the civil magistrate had not existed before this time. Rom. xiii. 4. From this preliminary legislation the synagogue has derived "the seven Noachic precepts," which were held to be obligatory upon all proselytes. These forbid (1) Idolatry. (2) Blasphemy. (3) Murder. (4) Incest. (5) Theft. (6) Eating of blood and strangled animals. (7) Disobedience to magistrates. (*Jacobus.*)

The brotherhood of man ought to be a sufficient guard of morality; but the sense of it in humanity is too weak to be effectual without the aid of religion, teaching, as it does, the highest form of that fact.

By thus reminding those who intend an injury to others of the common brotherhood of the race, there is an appeal to what is noble in human nature, which is anterior to the threat of law. We have here the suggestion and prophecy of those purer and nobler principles of action to which God is gradually leading up mankind. Moral *principles* are before the forms of law and shall survive them.

"I will require it." The trebling of the expression notes the intention of care which God hath over the life of man.—(*Hughes.*)

I, the Lord, will find the murderer out and exact the penalty of his crime. The very beast that causes the death of man shall be slain. The suicide and the homicide are alike accountable to God for the shedding of man's blood.—(*Murphy.*)

Verse 6. Here we have no pleasing dream of an ideal humanity. It is contemplated that the crime of murder would be committed.

The State must be founded upon *justice*, and in human society justice can only be maintained by punishment.

Punishment, though it may act as a deterrent, or as a means of improvement, must yet in itself be regarded as the upholding of justice against disobedience, the natural reaction of justice against its violation.

Those who are appointed to administer the law, and make effectual the sanctions of it, have a duty to do for society in the name of God.

Murder is the most extreme violation of the brotherly relation of mankind, and is to be punished accordingly. The penal power, attributable to God alone, is here committed to the hands of man.—*(Delitzsche.)*

This image of God, in which man was first formed, so belongs even to fallen man that such wilful destruction of human life is to be regarded as a crime against the Divine majesty, thus imaged in man.—*(Jacobus.)*

Capital punishment has been objected to on the ground that, as life is the gift of God, we have no right to take it away. But the real conflict here is between the sacredness of individual life and that of society. The question is not whether there shall be death, but whether society shall inflict it?

However expedient it may be to visit the crime of murder with the extreme penalty, yet the more excellent way, in which the spirit of the Christian religion leads, is to teach the sacredness of human life.

The image of God in man must be held as a constant fact, invariable in its essentials through all the changes of his moral history, and through all the mystery of his future. This fact has a bearing upon (1) *the question of human depravity.* Man is not altogether evil. The image of God in him is only defaced, not destroyed. There is something in his nature to which religion can make an appeal, otherwise he would be incapable of it. There must be something in the soul answering to truth and goodness. 2. *Upon the conversion of the soul.* That great spiritual crisis in a man's life destroys none of his natural powers, but only directs them into new channels, and exalts their energy. The image of God is brought out more clearly and perfectly. 3. *Upon immortality.* Man was made in the image of God, and, therefore, in the image of His immortality. God will not suffer a spark of Himself to see corruption. The Gospel *finds*, but does not *make*, men immortal. 4. *Upon wrongs done to our fellow creatures.* He who sins against a man sins against God, to whose image he does dishonour. In an especial manner he does so who sins against a child, where the image of God is fresh and new. Hence our Lord pronounces a heavy woe upon all who lay a stumbling-block in their way.

The first law promulgated in Scripture was that between Creator and creature. . . . And so it continued to be in the antediluvian world. No civil law is on record for the restriction of crime. . . . So long as the law was between Creator and creature, God Himself was not only the sole legislator, but the sole administrator of the law. The second law is that between creature and creature . . . . In the former case God is the administrator of the law, as He is the immediate and sovereign party in the legal compact. In the latter case, man is, by the express appointment of the Lord of all, constituted the executive agent.—(*Murphy.*)

Verse 7. An apparent repetition of verse 1, but with the added idea that the earth affords the necessary conditions for the multiplication of the race. The life of the earth is to be transformed into the life of man. The earth is the fruitful mother of mankind, both prefiguring and maintaining their fruitfulness.

How great is man, touching, as he does, the dust at one extremity and God at the other! He joins earth and heaven, frailty and immortal strength, brief life, and the day of eternity!

The command to multiply is repeated, and contains permission, not of promiscuous intercourse, like the brutes, but of honourable marriage. The same law which forbade the eating of blood, under the Gospel, forbade *fornication.*—(*Fuller.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 8—17.

God's Covenant with the New Humanity.

God makes a covenant with Noah as the head of the new race, and also with his sons, to show that it includes the whole human family. This is the first

covenant made with mankind in distinct terms; that made with Adam being implied, rather than formally indicated, by the relationship in which he stood to God. Now, a terrible Divine judgment upon human sin had intervened, so that God's dealings with man expressed themselves with suitable enlargements and circumstances. The moral necessities of man call for fresh revelations and provisions of Divine mercy. God meets man in an especial manner at every great moral crisis of human history. Of this covenant we may observe:—

I. It was a covenant originating with God Himself. The usual meaning of a covenant is that it is a compact entered into by two parties, with engagements on both sides, and ratified in solemn form. But here it signifies God's gracious promises to men, whereby He engages to grant them certain blessings on His own terms. While He is gracious towards sinners, God retains His prerogatives, and magnifies His glory. This covenant was not made at man's suggestion, nor accommodated to his terms. It was originated and framed by God alone. 1. *Men have no right to dictate to God.* He cannot deal with men on precisely the same terms on which men can deal with one another. The creature *belongs* to God, and must be content to receive whatever His goodness pleases to bestow. The case is still stronger when the creature has *fallen*, and can only stand in the position of a suppliant for mercy. When angels bow in silence, sinners must lie humbled in the dust. 2. *God reserves the power to bestow goodness.* Men are absolutely *helpless* in those things which concern their real life and supreme interest. They must perish in the consequences of their own sin, unless God interferes and stretches forth His hand to save. Man learns, sooner or later, that the great issues of his life are in the hands of God. This oppression of inability is intended to tame the wildness and presumption of man's nature, and to cast him entirely upon God. 3. *The character of God leads us to expect the advances of His goodness towards men.* Power by itself is a terrible attribute; admirable, but alarming. But power, when engaged on the side of mercy and love, gives encouragement and hope. The forces of nature impress us with a crushing sense of power, and the only refuge we have is in that infinite heart of goodness which lies behind them. From what we know of God's character, we may expect much from the gifts of His goodness. We may also, from His past dealings with the race, learn to trust His mercy. He had spared these eight souls, and this was a pledge that He would still be gracious, and that the resources of His mercy would not be overtasked by human sin. 4. *When God enters into covenant with His creatures He binds Himself.* God is infinite, yet for the sake of His creatures He condescends to bind Himself to certain courses of action. This He does, not as constrained by necessity or moved by caprice, but of His own free will and by the direction of His infinite reason. Creation itself was a limitation of God; it cannot all express His greatness or His glory, for God must be greater than all He has made or ordained. As the will of man can be limited by his determination, so God's design to bless and save imposes in its measure a restriction upon Himself. Thus God suffers Himself to *contract duties* towards man. This bears upon (1.) *The creation of rights in His creatures.* If God did not thus limit Himself, His creatures could have no *rights*, for they can enjoy no good but as He gives; and this is determined by His pleasure, and His pleasure binds Him when once expressed. God *allows* His creatures to have rights, which is in effect the passing over to them a portion of His own independence. (2.) *The possibility of man's sin being borne with.* God, in a moment, could silence all rebellion, but He gives promises which bind Him to delay punishment, or to devise means for restoration to His favour. Thus when the highest justice might take its course, He still bears with man's sin; for He has determined that His dealings shall take the course of mercy. 3. *The preservation of general laws for the benefit of men.* The laws of nature preserve certain rights of man, ensure his safety, and minister to his enjoyment. The laws of the spiritual world concern him as he is a responsible creature and a candidate for immortality. If he will conform to the will of God these will further and secure his most lasting interests. Yet in ordaining these laws God binds Himself towards His creatures. How gracious is the purpose of God when He thus suffers Himself to be limited by the measures of man's necessity!

II. It was a Covenant of Forbearance (Verses 11, 15). This covenant was simply a promise that God would not destroy the world of His creatures any more by means of a flood. He would not, until the consummation of all things, visit sin again by such an universal calamity of punishment. Here we have the forbearance of God. Severe judgments had been inflicted upon mankind, and now God promises the new race that His patience will not be exhausted while man remains upon the earth. 1. *This was an act of pure grace.* It has been said that man in Eden was under the covenant of works. This is not true, for no creature could be placed strictly in such a condition. Man was always under the covenant of grace; for whatever he possessed, or whatever he was permitted to do or enjoy, was possible to him only through the favour of God. The sin of man calls for *fresh* provisions, but they all come from grace. The forbearance of God is one particular form which His grace assumes toward mankind. 2. *Human history is a long comment upon the forbearance of God* (Rom. iii. 26; Acts xiv. 15). In the history of mankind, how much would arise to provoke continually the Divine displeasure! Yet, God would withhold Himself from destroying mankind as He did by the flood. His judgments, however severe, would not reach this awful limit. The contemplation of the sin of the world is a pain and distress to a good man, often awakening a holy zeal which prays that God might arise and scatter His enemies, that He might avenge the wrongs which sinners have inflicted upon the meek of the earth. Yet man's knowledge of the world's evil is limited, and therefore his sense of it imperfect. How much indignation against sin must a holy God feel who sees the iniquity of all times and places, and knows all the dark things of the heart and life! If history reveals the sin of man, it also reveals the forbearance of God. 3. *This forbearance of God was unconditional.* It was not a command relating to *conduct*, but a statement of God's gracious will towards mankind. This is evident from the subjects of it, some of whom are irresponsible and unconscious of any relations to God. Not only men capable of exercising reason, but infants also, and even the earth itself are included in this covenant. Still, though unconditional, God's gracious dealings were intended to evoke piety and devotion. 3. *This forbearance throws some light upon the permission of evil.* We ask, why does God permit evil to exert its terrible power through all ages? Our only answer is that His mercy triumphs over judgment. God bound Himself by a promise to continue the present course of nature and of His dealings, notwithstanding the persistence and awful developments of human sin. This indicates a *leaning* in the Divine Nature towards tenderness and compassion. Evil is permitted that greater good might arise, and that God might magnify His mercy. God's forbearance has a moral end in view—to lead men to repentance. It is His gracious purpose to allow sufficient time for the maintenance and issues of the conflict between good and evil, truth and error.

III. It was a covenant which, in the form and sign of it, was graciously adapted to man's condition. Man was weak and helpless, his sense of spiritual things blunted and impaired by sin. He was not able to appreciate Divine truth in its pure and native form. God must speak to him by signs and symbols, and encourage him by promises of temporal blessing. In this way alone he can rise from sensible things to spiritual, and from earthly good to the enduring treasures of heaven. In the form and sign of this covenant, we discover the Divine condescension to a creature of narrow range, materialised ideas, and a gross way of thinking. The great God speaks in human language, as if limiting Himself by man's weakness and ignorance. He allows men to conceive of Him in the forms and limitations of their own thought and being. We must thus think of God, in a greater or less degree, until "that which is perfect is come." In the education of mankind the spiritual must come last. God accommodates Himself to man's condition, and deals with him in ways having reserves of meaning, which they give up to him as he is able to receive. 1. *The terms of the covenant refer to the averting of temporal punishment, but suggest the promise of higher things.* The determination that the earth should be no more destroyed by a flood showed a tendency in the Divine mercy, from which greater things might be hoped. It seemed to encourage the expectation that God would be ready to save men from a more awful doom, and swallow up the worst penalties of sin in His own love. It may reconcile us to the permission of evil that there are remedies in the grace of God. The human race was not now ripe for the full revelation of God's mercy. It was necessary, therefore, to give mankind such a sense of it as they could feel and understand. By a long and weary journey must they be led to this promised land. 2. *The sign of the covenant was outward, but full of deep and precious meaning.* Covenants were certified by signs or tokens, such as a heap or pillar, or a gift (Gen. xxxi. 52 ; xxi. 30). The starry night was the sign of the promise to Abraham (Gen. xv). Here, the sign of the covenant was the rainbow ; a sign beautiful in itself, calculated to attract attention, and most fitting to teach the fact of God's constancy, and to encourage the largest hopes from His love. All this was an *education* for man, so that he might adore and hope for the Divine mercy. 1. *Mankind were to be educated through the beautiful.* From the works of nature, men could learn lessons of the faithfulness and constancy of God ; but there are certain features of His character which can only be learned through *beauty.* He who is perfect and holy is full of loveliness, and whatever is beautiful helps us to rise to the thought of it. Something more is necessary than the bare knowledge of spiritual truth, the soul must be filled with admiration and delight. The sense of beauty helps a man to rise out of himself, lifts him from all that is mean and unworthy, and prepares him for the scenes of grander worlds. He learns to look upon sin as a deformity, and upon God as beauty and love itself. The loveliness around us is so much of heaven on earth, as if that other world did not merely touch, but even overlap this. The beauty of the rainbow helped men to thoughts of heaven. 2. *Mankind were to be taught the symbolic meaning of nature.* All nature is a mighty parable of spiritual truth. Man puts meaning into things around him, and as his mind enlarges and his heart improves they give forth their meaning more plentifully, and strengthen his expectation of better things. They impart instruction, consolation, and hope, according to the soul which receives. It is scarcely a figure of speech that all things arise and praise God, for they embody His ideas, represent His truth, and show forth His glory. 3. *Mankind were to be taught that God is greater than nature.* The creature, however beautiful, or capable of inspiring awe and grandeur, must not be deified. This was God's bow, not Himself. God is separate from nature, and greater than it ; a living personality above all things created. If we could pursue nature to its furthest verge, we should find that we could not thus enclose and limit God ; He would still retire into the habitation of eternity ! (4.) *Mankind were to be taught to recognise a presiding mind in all the phenomena of nature.* "My bow." God calls it His own, as designed and appointed by Him. It can, indeed, be accounted for by natural causes. Science can explain how these seven rich and radiant stripes of colour are painted on the waters of the sky. Yet these laws of nature are but another name for the regular working of an Infinite Mind. God still upholds and guides all things; the numbers, weights, and measures whereof are with Him. There is no resting place for our mind and heart in second causes; we must come at last to a spiritual and intellectual subsistence—to a living personality. Nature without this view becomes a ruthless machine. (5.) *Man was to be assured that the mercy of God is equal to his extremity.* He will remember men for good in their greatest calamities and dangers. "I will look upon it that I may remember." Such words are accommodated to our ignorance and weakness, for the Infinite Memory has no need for such expedients. Such a device is out of tender consideration for us. Yet we may suppose that there is a sense in which God may be said to remember some things as standing out from the rest. He remembers the acts and signs of faith, the deeds of love. Not even a cup of cold water given in the name of His beloved Son can escape recognition. He who provides for all worlds, and sustains the mighty cares and interests of them, can yet stoop to the lowly, and puts the tears of His persecuted saints into His own bottle. In this appointed sign of the rainbow, the eye of man meets the eye of God. Men look to God from the depths of their calamity, and He looks to them and remembers the token of His mercy. The human and the Divine may meet in a symbol, which is a light held to the struggling soul, a comfort and an assurance. Such is the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. Some might say, Could not Christ have trusted unceasing devotion to Himself, to the love and spirituality of his followers? Surely their knowledge of His character, and their zeal for Him, would never suffer them to forget Him? But He knew the human heart better than to trust this to a purely spiritual feeling, and therefore appointed an outward sign. Here Christ and His people look upon one common object, eye meets eye, and heart unites with heart. Such symbols train men in spiritual ideas, they fix the heart and entertain it with delight, they render devotion easy. Man in this first stage of his education for higher worlds needs them, and will still find sweet uses in them until he dwells in the "new heavens and the new earth." Those aids from form and sight shall be no longer needed when the eye is entertained with the vision of God.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 8. God spake to Noah as the head of his family, and therefore the representative of the whole human race.

God still speaks to mankind, not as divided by separate interests, but as forming one family having the same superior and permanent interests. From this family He is ever gathering another, more exalted and select, united to Himself by the dearest ties of spiritual likeness and generation.

A nation can never be wise and great until the families of it hear and obey the voice of God. The purity of family life is the true defence and safety of the State.

1. The speaker Elohim, the mighty God who was able to do every word. 2. The hearers whom this concerned, Noah and his sons with him. Such as could understand, to them only he speaketh, though the matter which he spake concerneth such as could not understand, as infants and beasts. 3. The speech, which was intent and pressing, *He said in saying*, that is, He seriously and earnestly spake what followeth.—(*Hughes.*)

Verse 9. God enters into covenant relations with Noah as the [illegible] head and father of the race.

This covenant was not made until Noah, as a representative of the new humanity, had by *sacrifice* confessed his sin and signified his hope of salvation. (Gen. viii. 20, 21.) It was a proof that his offering was accepted.

God prevents man, with the blessings of His goodness, anticipating his desire and need; yet that goodness is not declared and revealed until man has felt his deep necessity. This covenant does but express in due form what the love of God had long before intended.

God's covenants show—1. That He is willing to contract duties towards man. Man can therefore hope for and obtain that which he cannot claim as a *right*. Thus "Mercy rejoiceth against judgment." (James ii. 13.) 2. That man's duty has relation to a personal Lawgiver. There is no independent morality. All human conduct must ultimately be viewed in the light of God's requirements. 3. That man needs a special revelation of God's love. The light of nature is not sufficient to satisfy the longings of the soul and encourage hope. We require a distinct utterance—a sign from heaven. The vague sublimities of created things around us are unsatisfying, we need the assurance that behind all there is a heart of infinite compassion. 4. That every new revelation of God's character implies corresponding duties on the part of man. The progress of revelation has refined and exalted the principle of duty, until man herein is equal unto the angels, and learns to do "all for love, and nothing for reward."

"With your seed after you." God's promises extend to the latest hour of human history; they encourage us to expect a bright future for the race. Let us not indulge in any melancholy or depressing views, but wait in patience and hope until these promises have yielded all their wealth.

My Covenant. The covenant which was before mentioned to Noah in the directions concerning the making of the ark, and which was really, though tacitly, formed with Adam in the garden.—*(Murphy.)*

We see here (1) the mercy and goodness of God, in proceeding with us in a way of covenant. He might have exempted the world from this calamity, and yet not have told them He would do so. The remembrance of the flood might have been a sword hanging over their heads *in terrorem*. But He will set their minds at rest on that score. Thus He deals with us in His Son. Being willing that the heirs of promise should have strong consolation, He confirms His word by an oath. (2) The importance of living under the light of revelation. Noah's posterity by degrees sunk into idolatry, and became "strangers to the covenants of promise." Such were our fathers for many ages, and such are great numbers to this day. (3) The importance of being believers. Without this, it will be worse for us than if we had never been favoured with a revelation. (4) The kind of life which it was God's design to encourage: *a life of faith*. "The just shall live by faith." If He had made no revelation of Himself, no covenants, and no promises, there would be no ground for faith; and we must have gone through life feeling after Him without being able to find Him: but having made known His mind, there is light in all our dwellings, and a sure ground for believing not only in our exemption from another flood, but in things of far greater importance.—*(Fuller.)*

Verse 10. As the flood destroyed all the animals who entered not into the ark, so they were interested with man in the terms of this Divine promise. "The whole creation" is represented by Paul as groaning and travailing in pain together in sympathy with the curse upon man (Rom. viii. 22). God, by the prophet, represents this covenant as confirmed by all the solemnity of an oath. "I have sworn," etc. (Isa. liv. 9.)—*(Jacobus.)*

God stands in certain relations to creatures who are entirely unconscious of them. What these relations are, we cannot fully know; but we may be assured that they exist. God will yet give a voice to the dumb agony of creation, and redeem the creature from that emptiness of all solid result in which all things, at present, seem to end.

When man fell, there was a corresponding reduction along the whole scale of nature; when he was restored to God's favour, the promise was given that there would be as far-reaching an extension of blessing. A covenant with man cannot concern him alone, for he is bound up with all nature under him as well as with all that is above him.

God shows compassion for creaturely life upon the earth.

Man is viewed in revelation both as he is connected with God and nature.

Such as know not God's covenant may have a part in it.—(*Hughes*).

Verse 11. The covenant was reduced to a single provision,—that the judgment of such a flood should not again be visited upon mankind. Such was the simple form which the promise of God assumed in this infancy of the new humanity. Yet here was a Divine forbearance which was a prophecy of better things, as it afforded scope for the deeds of mercy.

The covenant of law, as given to the old man, is all "*Thou shalt.*" So God to Adam said, "*Thou shalt* not eat of it; in the day thou eatest *thou shalt* surely die:" and by Moses repeating the same covenant of law, each command reiterates the same, "Thou shalt." Such a covenant is all "of works." There is a command to be fulfilled by man, and, therefore, its validity depends upon man's part being performed as well as God's. Such a covenant cannot stand, for man ever fails in his part. Thus the covenant of law or works to man is only condemnation. But finding fault with this, the Lord saith, "I will make a new covenant," and this new covenant or gospel throughout says, not "Thou shalt," but "I will." It is "the promise," as says St. Paul to the Galatians. All that it requires is simple faith (Gal. iii. 16-29). "This is the covenant I will make in those days, saith the Lord; I *will* put my laws in their hearts; I *will* write them in their minds; I *will* be merciful to their transgressions; I *will* remember their sins no more; I *will* dwell in them; I *will* walk in them." It is this "I will" which Noah now hears, and to which at this stage God adds "a token" set in heaven.—(*Jukes: Types of Genesis.*)

This expresses also the security of the moral world against perishing in a deluge of anarchy, or in the floods of popular commotion (Ps. xciii).—(*Lange.*)

Verse 12. Every covenant requires an outward sign or token, by which God suffers Himself to be reminded of His promise.

A token is needed to confirm our faith in that which was done in the past, and though it still abides with us in unworn energy of blessing, we need the aid of these things that we may recognise God.

God does not leave men to general notions of, and vague expectations from His goodness. On fitting occasions in the world's history He certifies that goodness to them.

Such tokens are instances of God's condescension to the weakness of man. This principle will account for much concerning the *form* in which revelation is given us. All such communications from God must be conditioned by the nature and capacity of him who receives.

God's mind is to teach His Church by visible signs as well as by His Word.—(*Hughes.*)

Verse 13. God made or constituted the rainbow to be the sign of His covenant, and therefore calls it "My bow." The covenant token, as well as the thing itself, was God's own.

This token was made to appear in the *clouds*, because their gathering together would strike terror in those who had witnessed the deluge; or who would, afterwards learn, by report, of that awful judgment. In the very danger itself, God often causes the sign of hope to appear.

As it is the sun's rays shining through the rain drops that reflect this glowing image on the black cloud, so is it also a fitting symbol of the Sun of Righteousness reflected, in His glorious attributes, upon the face of every dark and threatening dispensation towards His Church.—*(Jacobus.)*

Men find their last refuge and hope in looking up to God, who fails not to comfort them with the token of mercy.

The appointment of the sign of the covenant, or of the rainbow as God's bow of peace, whereby there is at the same time expressed—1. The elevation of men above the deification of the creature (since the rainbow is not a divinity but a sign of God, an appointment which even idolatrous nations appear not to have wholly forgotten, when they denote it God's bridge, or God's messenger). 2. Their introduction to the symbolic comprehension and interpretation of natural phenomena, even to the symbolising of forms and colours. 3. That God's compassion remembers men in their dangers. 4. The setting up of a sign of light and fire, which, along with its assurance that the earth will never be drowned again in water, indicates at the same time its future transformation through light and fire.—*(Lange.)*

To the spiritual mind, all natural phenomena are God's revelation of Himself; each one of them answering to some other truth of His.

The rainbow is an index that the sky is not wholly overcast, since the sun is shining through the shower, and thereby demonstrating its partial extent. There could not, therefore, be a more beautiful or fitting token. It comes with its mild radiance only when the cloud condenses into a shower. It consists of heavenly light; variegated in hue and mellowed in lustre, filling the beholder with an involuntary pleasure. It forms a perfect arch, extends as far as the shower extends, connects heaven and earth, and spans the horizon. In these respects it is a beautiful emblem of mercy rejoicing against judgment, a light from heaven irradiating and beatifying the soul, of grace always sufficient for the need, of the reunion of earth and heaven, and of the universality of the offer of salvation.—*(Murphy.)*

An arch, cheering and bright, embraces the firmament. On a scroll of variegated light there is inscribed—"These storms drop fertility: they break to bless and not to injure."—*(Archdeacon Law: "Christ is All.")*

Verse 14. The regularity with which the rainbow appears in the sunshine after rain does not set aside the fact that it is brought to pass by the ever-living energy of the Creator "When *I* bring," etc.

A purely spiritual mind sees in all things in nature the working of a personal will, and does not require that distinct evidence of it which a miracle supplies.

Science deals with nature as a collection of facts, to be classified and explained as modes of the operation of general laws; but the Bible only considers the *religious* idea of nature.

The sun looks forth from the opposite skies. Its rays enter the descending drops, and returning to the eye in broken pencils, paint the bow on the illumined back-ground. Heaven dries up the tears of earth, and the high roof above seems to take up the Gospel hymn, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men."—*(Archdeacon Law: "Christ is All.")*

Verse 15. This token is for God as well as for man. God deigns here to appoint it as a remembrance to Himself. "It is a bow (says Dr. Gill), yet without arrows, and pointed upward to heaven, and not downward to the earth."—*(Jacobus).*

The following prayer, found in the Talmud, is directed to be recited upon every appearance of the rainbow: "Blessed be thou Jehovah our God, King of eternity, ever mindful of thy covenant, faithful in thy covenant, firm in thy word."

When the Scripture says "God remembers," it means that we feel and are conscious that He remembers it, namely, when He outwardly presents

Himself in such a manner, that we, thereby, take notice that He thinks thereon. Therefore it all comes to this: as I present myself to God, so does He present Himself to me.—*(Luther.)*

We can only conceive of God through our human thoughts and feelings. In this way we obtain those consolatory views of His nature which we miss when we are ambitious of an over-refinement.

When God appoints the sign of the covenant, He obliges Himself, or contracts the duty, to meet man there.

How sacred are those symbols that may be said to arrest the glance of the Infinite eye—to concentrate the attention of God! They give that reality to spiritual blessings which, in the mere processes of thought, would become a cold abstraction.

The Scripture is most unhesitating and frank in ascribing to God all the attributes and exercises of personal freedom. While man looks on the bow to recall the promise of God, God Himself looks upon it to remember and perform this promise. Here freedom and immutability of purpose meet.—(*Murphy.*)

Verses 16, 17. It was to be an "everlasting covenant,"—to last until it should be needed no more.

If God looks upon the rainbow to remember, so should we, with a fresh sense of wonder and recognition of His presence. Faith in Him can alone prevent our losing this sense of wonder.

Memorial was the chief purpose intended by this sign. In that early age of the world all was wonderful, for everything seemed fresh from God. Signs were not then intended to generate faith, but to be a memorial of it.

As the rainbow lights up the dark ground that just before was discharging itself in flashes of lightning, it gives us an idea of the victory of God's love over the black and fiery wrath; originating as it does from the effects of the sun upon the sable vault, it represents to the senses the readiness of the heavenly light to penetrate the earthly obscurity; spanned between heaven and earth, it announces peace between God and man; arching the horizon, it proclaims the all-embracing universality of the covenant of grace. (*Delitzsche.*)

We could not know that God had appointed such a sign but for the inspired record. Revelation is needed even to teach us the significance of nature.

How can we render thanks enough for this superadded pearl in our diadem of encouragements? We are thus led to look for our bow on the cloud of every threatening storm. In the world of nature it is not always visible; but in the world of grace it ever shines. When the darkest clouds thicken around us, the Sun of Righteousness is neither set nor has eclipse, and its ready smile converts the drops into an arch of peace. . . . .

In our journey through the wilderness, the horizon is often obscured by storms like these: terrors of conscience,—absence of peace,—harassing perplexities,—crushing burdens of difficulties. But from behind these dusky curtains, the bow strides forth in its strength.—(*Archdeacon Law: "Christ is All."*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 18, 19.

THE FACTORS OF HUMAN CULTURE.

Mankind have a common calling as human beings, to which we give the name of *culture*. This comprehends all influences from without that form the human character and create history. The world of mankind is a complex product which several elements have helped to form. The names of these progenitors of the new race are significant of great principles of thought and action, which have guided the progress and shaped the destinies of mankind. We have here those effective powers which have been at work throughout the whole course of history.

I. Religion. This is represented by *Shem*, which signifies "the name," *i.e.* the name of God with all its fulness of meaning for man. The knowledge of that name was to be preserved through Shem, for without it the race must fail to reach its highest perfection. Shem is mentioned first because religion is the chief glory of man, the only source of his true greatness, and the only worthy end of his life. Without religion, man must be ignorant of his destiny and the ultimate aim of history. The knowledge and practice of it can alone redeem men from the vanity of their condition. Consider religion:—1. *As a system of thought.* It has certain truths addressed to the intellect, heart, and conscience. Religion comprises—(1.) *The knowledge of God.* What God is in Himself is beyond our comprehension; His nature eludes our furthest search, and retires into that eternity which He alone inhabits. But it is possible for us to know God in those relations in which He stands to ourselves. The revelation of His *name* has therefore an important meaning for mankind. All our duties, hopes, and destinies are bound up with it. Man must know God in this regard before the lost features of the Divine image in him can be restored. There is a knowledge of God which is but a barren exercise of the mind, which regards the subject as merely curious and in no way connected with man's life. It is necessary that men should feel after God, and be conscious of Him as the Ever Near. God must be a felt reality, or there can be no true knowledge. To know God is to know the chief end of life, that ethical side of knowledge which the Scripture calls wisdom. (2.) *Religion comprises the knowledge of man* From it alone we can learn what man is in his nature and origin, what are his relations to God, his duties in the world, why he is here, and what is his prospect beyond life. Science may investigate the nature of man, and even prescribe his duties. It may minister to his prosperity in the world. But science only lights up the valleys of our nature; the summits of it can only be illumined by a light from heaven. The contemplation of human nature apart from religion is gloomy and uncomfortable. *The true knowledge of ourselves is an essential part of religion.* We must know ourselves as capable of God, and of all those great things for which He can fashion and prepare us. The religious idea of man is necessary to the true study of himself. (3.) *The knowledge of things.* Man has powers to observe the facts and appearances of nature, to reason upon them, and to reduce the results of his investigation to the systems of science. But the grandeur of this universe can never be truly felt and seen until we look at it through God. The things that are made are His thoughts; they show forth His glory. True piety in the heart transforms creation into a mighty temple filled with the praises of its Maker. The study of things yields but a melancholy satisfaction if we do not see above them the Divine eye and heart. Religion raises all science to a higher truth. 2. *As a rule of life.* The truths of religion are not intended merely to give us right thoughts of God and our condition here, but also to teach us how to live. The fact that God stands in certain relations to ourselves implies that there are certain duties arising out of those relations. To the revelation of the Divine name, as preserved by the family of Shem, mankind owes the noblest motive of conduct, the highest ideal of virtue and of life. If it was given to the Greeks to develop the powers of the *intellect*, it was the prerogative of Judaism to develop the *conscience*. How superior is the moral code delivered to the chosen race to that of the nations that lived about them! The standard of morality is raised in all those nations where the light of revelation shines. In the culture of the human race in virtue, religion is the chief factor. 3. *As a remedy for sin.* It was given to the family of Shem to nourish the expectation of the Messiah, to prepare mankind for His coming, and to witness His manifestation. The weight of sin pressed upon the human conscience, and men sought in many ways to avert the displeasure of heaven and secure acceptance. Hence the various religions of the world. Mankind yearned for some Deliverer from sin, who could restore light and peace to their souls. The coming of Christ imparted a sublime impulse to the education of the world. In Him humanity had reached its flower and perfection. The noblest ideal of life was given. Devotion was rendered easier for the mind and heart. The whole conception of the dignity of human nature was raised when God became man The true way of peace was made known to the troubled conscience, and men could come to their Father in the joy of forgiveness. The passion for Christ, generated by the sense of His love, has produced the noblest heroism which the world has ever seen. It has developed the highest type of man. If the "Desire of all nations" had not come, how different would have been the issues of history; how aimless and unsatisfactory all human effort! We cannot overrate the influence of religion on the *intellectual progress* of mankind. It will be found that all the greatest and most exalted ideas in the mind of the poorest and most unlearned man in Christendom are derived from religion. Christianity has made the greatest ideas common to all.

II. The spirit of work and enterprise. This is another factor which enters into the culture of the human race. It is represented by Japheth, which signifies *enlargement*. There was in him an energy by which he could overcome obstacles and expand his empire over the world. This spirit of work and enterprise has given birth to *civilisation*. The union of external activity with mental power is the source of man's greatness and superiority in the world. 1. *It is necessary to material progress.* In the division of human labour the *thinkers* stand first of all. Mind must survey the work and plan the means by which it is to be accomplished. But for the *practical* work of life, there must be energy to carry out the thoughts of the mind, and render them effective in those labours which minister to prosperity and happiness. Man cannot obtain the victory over Nature by contemplation alone. Philosophy must come down from her high seat and mix with men before any great practical results can be secured. Nature places obstacles in the way of man to rouse his thought and develop his powers of invention and contrivance. He has to contend with the earth and the sea, and even against some adverse forces in society itself. It is necessary that this contest should be directed by the *few* who are thinkers, yet it can only come to a successful issue by the labours of the *many* who are workers. 2. *It is necessary to mental progress.* The knowledge and contemplation of truth only partially satisfies the necessities of the mind. Truth becomes an energy when it is embodied and doing work. By the application of abstract truths to the labours of life man has accomplished the greatest results. The mind becomes expanded when it is able to pass from the knowledge of its own facts to those of the world around. By far the larger proportion of human knowledge has been acquired by the actual struggle with the difficulties of our present existence. The battle of life has drawn out the powers of the mind. 3. *It is necessary to religious progress.* The knowledge of spiritual truth must be expressed in duty, or man can have no religion. Doctrines are only valuable as they teach us how to live. Activity without contemplation has many evils, but united with it is the perfection of spiritual life. True thoughts of God and ourselves must be manifested in that energy by which we contend with evil, and perform our duty.

III. The power of evil. This is represented by Ham, who is the picture of moral inability—of one who knows his duty but is unable to perform it. Evil is the disquieting element in human culture; a disadvantage, like friction in a machine. Moral weakness complicates man's struggle, protracts it through the ages, and delays victory. The tremendous power of evil must be acknowledged, but it is a terrible factor in the estimate of all human thoughts, struggles, and labours. In the culture of humanity, Ham lays waste the labours of Shem and Japheth. The persistence of evil demands new vigour from those who think and from those who work. One sinner can destroy much good that earnest minds and hearts have slowly laboured to build up. A large portion of the energy of mankind is spent in contention with evil, in neutralising the labours of one another, and but a poor remainder issues in useful work. This power of evil accounts for—1. *The slow education of the race.* 2. *The monstrous forms of vice.* These are developed even in the midst of the best influences and restraints. 3. *The limited diffusion of religion.* 4. *The imperfection of the best.* Still our great hope for the race is that evil is not the strongest power in it. Man is capable of goodness, of receiving the grace of God in sufficient measures to ensure his victory. Christ did not despair of humanity, for He knew it could be united to God and prevail. Religion is the strongest force in society; and though in the course of history Shem is the *last* to be developed, yet he is *first* in the kingdom of God. Japheth's activity may secure present admiration, yet mankind must confess at last that to the preserver of the *Divine name* and *salvation* it owes its true wealth, prosperity, and lasting honour.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 18, 19. In the development now to appear, we naturally turn to the sons of Noah, to see whether the promised salvation is soon to come. Here for the fourth time the sons of Noah are mentioned (cf. v. 32; vi. 10; vii. 13), to show that these alone came out of the ark as the branches into which the human family was now to be divided. In the new development now to be traced out, the character of the sons of Noah is to be given to show that the hope of the race in the Messiah was to be not in the line of Ham, nor of Japheth, but of Shem—leading also to an enlargement of Japheth. This is in accordance with what is seen in the conduct of the brothers.—(*Jacobus.*)

In the individual character of the sons of Noah, we have the ground-plan of all history.

Shem and Japheth are very different, but are, in their piety, the root of every ideal and humane tendency. The people and kingdom of China are a striking example of the immense power that lies in the blessings of filial piety, but at the same time a proof that filial piety, without being grounded in something deeper, cannot preserve even the greatest of peoples from falling into decay, like an old house, before their history ends.—(*Lange.*)

In Shem and Japheth we have the representatives of action and contemplation. These types of character appear in the Christian Church in such as Peter and John, Martha and Mary. Nor is the dark type of evil wanting: there was a Ham in the family of Noah, and there was a Judas among the Apostles.

It was plainly the design and intention of God that mankind should not retain uniformity of manners and sentiments; but that by breaking them into separate communities, and by dispersing them over different countries and climates, they should be made to differ from each other by an indefinite diversity of customs and opinions. (*Grinfield.*)

These two verses form a connecting link between the preceding and the following passage. After the recital of the covenant comes naturally the statement, that by the three sons of Noah, duly enumerated, was the whole land populated. This forms a fit conclusion to the previous paragraph. But the penman of these sentences had evidently the following paragraph in view. For he mentions that Ham is the father of Kenaan; which is plainly the preface to the following narrative. (*Murphy.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 20—27.

The Lessons of Noah's Fall.

The second head of the human race passed through an experience of moral disaster, which in many features reminds us of the fate of the first. Adam fell through sensual indulgence, and so did Noah. Adam fell after God had given him the charter of dominion over the earth and all creatures. Noah fell when that charter had been renewed with added privileges. Both had received direct assurance of the Divine favour. The fruit which Noah tasted, and which caused him to transgress, was a mild reflex of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam sinned by partaking of that which was prohibited; Noah sinned by excessive indulgence in that which was allowed. There are lessons of Noah's fall that are of special importance to us. His (unlike that of Adam) was not the fall of the innocent, but the fall of a sinner who had found acceptance with God. The lessons to be derived are most appropriate to our condition. They are—

I. The moral dangers of social progress. Noah had been a husbandman, but he had laid the duties of it aside in order to prepare the ark. Now he resumes his old employment, and advances one step in social progress by beginning to cultivate the vine. Civilisation multiplies and refines our pleasures, opening up to us new sources of enjoyment. But it has special dangers. 1. *Increased temptations to sensual indulgence.* In the earliest times the habits of those who tilled the ground were simple, and the temptations arising from sensual enjoyments few. When toil "strung the nerves and purified the blood" the appetites were healthy, and easily satisfied. But when arts multiplied, new delights arose to please and stimulate a jaded appetite, and man began to feel the dangerous charms of luxury. Whatever multiplies the pleasures of sense sets more snares in the way of the soul. 2. *It exercises a tyranny over us.* Civilisation extends and varies our means of enjoyment. We grow accustomed to the luxuries which it brings, until these become a necessity of our nature. We are made their slaves. Noah lighted upon a new means of indulgence which has often created a dangerous craving, and bound man fast by the chains of evil habit. All indulgences, beyond the satisfaction of the simple necessities of nature, have in them some of the elements of seduction. The comforts of civilisation please and charm us; but when in a moment of moral heroism we strive to be independent of them, we feel their chain. The pursuit of pleasure to excess is the great danger of all civilised societies. Few have the moral strength to subjugate the love of earthly delights to the higher purposes of life. 3. *It tends to make us satisfied with the present.* When sources of pleasure are plentiful, and our taste of them rendered more exquisite by the refinements of an advanced civilisation, we are tempted to become so satisfied with earth that we feel no need of heaven. In the charms of worldly pleasures we grow insensible to the higher joys of the Spirit: we lend but a dull ear to the voice of duty, we become too soft and cowardly to wage the war with temptation and to fight the good fight.

II. The spreading power of evil. Noah did not, at first, intend to prostrate himself beneath the power of wine; but, led on by the gratification it afforded, he relaxed his moral control over himself and fell under the temptation. One evil, having gained admittance, opened the way for many. It is true, especially of the sins of the flesh, that one form of degradation quickly succeeds another. Sensual sin, by weakening the power of self-control, leaves a man helpless against the further assaults of temptation. He who once allows evil to gain the mastery over him cannot tell to what degrading depths he may descend. Evil has a tremendous power to spread. This is illustrated in the history of *individuals.* One sin generates another, until he who has turned aside from the paths of virtue to taste some forbidden joy, is led further and further astray, and, at length, finds it difficult to return. It is the nature of sin to deceive, so that the victim of temptation has little suspicion of the base uses to which he may come. We have another illustration in the history of *families.* How often have sins of sensuality acted like a contagion among the members of a family! Besides, sins of this kind are often inherited, the mischief not terminating with the first transgressors, but spreading like a foul infection to others. And a further illustration in the history of *nations.* At first, they rise to fame and greatness by manly courage and virtue; but prosperity tempts them to sins of luxury and indulgence, and then the worm of decay is at their root. A nation like that of the ancient Romans would never have been conquered by a foreign power, if it had not been first weakened by internal corruptions.

III. The temptations which assail when the excitement of a great purpose is past. While Noah was preparing the ark he was above the assaults of temptation. The excitement of a great purpose filled his mind, and he remained pure in the midst of the profligacy of the age. Now, when the work is over, he falls an easy prey to temptation. Activity with a worthy end in view is the best preservative of virtue. It is the very greatness of man that renders a life having no sufficient aim and purpose intolerable. There should be one great purpose in life, which can be continually reached after but not attained. This alone can promote that activity which preserves our moral health; but if we trust to *special victories,* the ease and gratification of success which attends them may prove dangerous. Noah rested in *one work* accomplished, and forgetting that the great purpose of life still remains, the hero of faith falls a victim to the sins of sense. With the height of heaven above us, we should never rest, but keep our graces and virtues alive by exercise.

IV. The power of transgression to develop moral character in others. The tendencies to evil often remain inert in us, but become developed to their issues by outward circumstances. The inward man thus makes himself known to the world what he is. 1. *The sins of others give occasion for fresh sins in ourselves.* Noah fell under the temptation to self-indulgence, and while helpless with excess of wine his son dishonours him by a shameless deed. By means of the sin of the one the character of the other stands revealed. The true moral nature of a man may be gathered from the manner in which he regards or treats the sin of others. If he glories in their shame, or is driven by it into further sin, his nature must be truly vile. 2. *The sins of others may give occasion for some high moral action.* Good men may interfere in the transgressions of others by their counsel, by timely reproof, by seeking to remove the temptation and prevent further evils. So it is here. A kind of moral ingenuity was exercised, adapting itself to a sudden emergency. Thus the evil of one man may serve to discover the virtue of another.

V. The apparent dependence of prophecy upon the accidents of human conduct. The sin of Ham, and the generous conduct of his two brothers, furnished what appears to be the accidental occasion of a remarkable prophecy.

The words of Noah take too wide a range and are too awful in their import to warrant the interpretation that they were the expression of a private feeling. They are a sketch of the future history of the world. The language is prophetic of the fate of nations. It may seem strange that so important an utterance should arise out of the accident of one man's transgression. *The same account, too, must be given of the greater part of the structure of Scripture.* Some portions were written at the request of private persons, some to refute certain heresies which had sprung up in the Church. Many of the books in the New Testament owe their origin to the needs and disorders of the time. But this does not destroy the authority or Divine origin of the Scripture, for the following reasons: 1. *The Bible has thus imparted to it a human character and interest.* There is in the Word a human element as well as a Divine, a revelation of man as well as a revelation of God. The voice of eternal truth is heard speaking through human passions and interests. The fact that the Bible is true to the realities of human nature accounts, in no small degree, for the hold which it has on the mind and heart. The *form* in which it is given may, in our present condition, be the best for promoting our spiritual education. 2. *The Bible is unfolded by an inner law.* We must not regard the Bible as a collection of histories and sayings preserved by the Church, and bound together in one book. It is truly to us the Word of God, for His higher wisdom has guided and inspired each part, and informed the whole with an organic unity of life. As in the ordinary history of the world, God is ever weaving what seems to us accident into the system of His providence, so in the formation of His written Word He makes the passing events of time to be part of the system of spiritual truth. 3. *The Bible shows the advance of history towards an end.* The Old Testament history looks forward to the coming of the Messiah. No series of events are recorded as facts terminating in themselves, but rather as having reference to that supreme hour of the world's history when God should be manifest in the flesh. All was ministering to that "fulness of time" when mankind would be prepared to welcome their deliverer from heaven. Human history centres in the Son of Man. Mankind are either looking out for Christ, or they are actors in a history developed from Him. By the Christian mind, history is still to be regarded as working towards that definite end described by St. Paul, when he declares the purpose of God to be the building up of all mankind into one (Eph. ii. 11–22). The Bible records events not as a chronicle of the past, but as showing how the Divine purpose has been, and is still being accomplished. In this view the human aspect of Scripture history appears as transfigured. The deeper intents of its teaching can only be read by a spiritual light.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 20. The second head of the race, as the first, must find his true prosperity and happiness in activity.

If Noah was before a mechanic, it is evident that he must now attend to the cultivation of the soil, that he may draw from it the means of subsistence. *He planted a vineyard.* God was the first planter (Gen. ii. 8), and since that time we hear nothing of the cultivation of trees till Noah becomes a planter. The cultivation of the vine and the manufacture of wine might have been in practice before this time, as the mention of them is merely incidental to the present narrative. But it seems likely from what follows, that though grapes may have been in use, wine had not been extracted from them.—(*Murphy.*)

The vine in its significance:—1. In its perilous import. 2. In its higher significance. God hath provided not merely for our necessity, but also for our refreshment and exhilaration. The more refined His gifts, so much the more ought they to draw us, and make us feel the obligation of a more refined life.—*(Lange.)*

Noah's care in the cleansed earth is the vine. In the sphere of old Adam, and before the flood, that is before regeneration, Noah was no planter. There his work was the ark: there, day and night, instead of planting the vine, he was cutting down the high trees; as the Church's work in the world still is to lay the axe to the root of man's pride; to lay them low, that by the experience of death they may reach a better life. But in the Church, regenerate man has other work. There the vine is to be trained, and pruned, and cultivated: there its precious juice, which gladdens God and man, is to be drunk with thankfulness and joy to God's glory.–*(Jukes: Types of Genesis.)*

God plants His own vineyard—the Church—though men may abuse the privileges it affords.

Verse 21. We are not in a position to estimate how much blame is to be imputed to Noah. He may have been ignorant of the strength of the wine, or have been rendered susceptible to its influence by his age. At best, he was *overtaken* in a fault. The external degradation and the physical penalties would be the same whatever be the amount of guilt.

Times of festivity require a double guard. Neither age nor character are any security in the hour of temptation. Who would have thought that a man who had walked with God, perhaps more than five hundred years, and who had withstood the temptations of a world, should fall alone? This was like a ship which had gone round the world being overset in sailing into port. One heedless hour may stain the fairest life, and undo much of the good which we have been doing for a course of years.—*(Fuller.)*

Drunkenness: 1. An abuse of the goodness of God. 2. A sin against the body. It deforms and degrades the temple of the soul. 3. Weakens the moral principle, and thus exposes a man to countless evils.

The sins of the flesh reveal the moral nakedness of the soul.

Wine is a mocker, and may deceive the holiest men that are not watchful (Prov. xx. 1).

Intemperance leads to shame, degrades the most respectable to the level of the brute, and subjects the wise and good to derision and scorn, puts a man's actions out of his own control, and sets a most pernicious example in the family and in society.—*(Jacobus.)*

Verse 22. In such a world as this the mere *sight* of evil things may be accidental; the sin lies in the *beholding* of them so as to make them objects of unlawful interest.

To have complacency in the sin of others, and to make a mock at it is the mark of fools.

A slight circumstance may serve to reveal the moral nature. There is a fine instinct in superior virtue which can adapt itself to the difficulties and complications of the world's evil.

It is the mark of a base mind to publish the shame of others, when it is in our power to hide it and cover it in oblivion by some loving deed.

Love covers; Ham, instead of veiling his father's nakedness, only the more openly uncovers what he had left exposed. As a son he transgresses against his father; so, as a brother, would he become the seducer of his brother.—*(Lange.)*

The evil have an eye for evil, while the good and loving are engaged in acts of charity. Thus He, whose work it is to bring to light the hidden things of darkness, by the failure of one often reveals another's heart. The Church's fall, the misuse of gift in some, is made the occasion for stripping the self-deceiver bare. Men sit in judgment on the evil in the Church, full of impatience and self, laying all iniquity bare, not waiting for the righteous Judge; little thinking that, whilst they are judging evil, God by the evil may be trying and judging them; or that the spirit which exposes others' sin may be far more hateful to Him than some misuse of privileges.—(*Jukes: "Types of Genesis".*)

Verse 23. A virtuous mind is quick to discover means of freeing itself from moral embarrassment.

Reverence for all that is about us—for all that is human—is the root of social virtue.

Two things are brought out by this fall; sin in some, and grace in others, of the Church's sons. Ham not only sees, but tells the shame abroad, without so much as an attempt to place a rag on that nakedness, which, as the sin of one so near to him, should have been his own shame. Shem and Japheth will not look upon it, but "walking backward,"—a path not taught by nature, but grace,—cover their father's nakedness.—(*Jukes "Types of Genesis."*)

The conduct of these two brothers is in accordance with the prophecy which follows. Nations, as such, have a moral character. Prophecy is but the distinct announcement of the working out of great moral principles through the course of history.

Verse 24. The degradation of a man must at length come to light, and appear to himself. For every sinner there is an awakening.

When Noah came to himself, he knew what had been done by his younger son. Nothing is said of his grief for his own sin. We are not to consider what follows as an ebullition of personal resentment, but as a prophecy which was meant to apply, and has been ever since applying to his posterity, and which it was not possible for human resentment to dictate. (*Fuller.*)

God brings to light the wicked practices of ungracious ones against His saints, and sheweth it to His prophets.—(*Hughes.*)

Verse 25. The interpretation that would resolve this declaration of Noah into an expression of private feeling is refuted by the history of those nations which sprang from his sons. That history confirms the prophecy, and proves it to be such.

The fulfilment of this prophecy took a wider range than could be contemplated by expressions dictated in a moment of passion. The descendants of Ham flourished for long ages after this curse was pronounced, maintained their independence, and founded empires. Their power was not utterly broken, nor did they sink into subjection until the time of the captivity. All this was too wide a prospect into futurity for the unaided mind of man to behold.

It is a historical fact that the degradation of slavery has fallen especially upon the race of Ham. A portion of the Kenaanites became bondsmen among the Israelites, who were of the race of Shem. The early Babylonians, the Phœnicians, the Carthaginians, and Egyptians, who all belonged to the race of Ham, were subjugated by the Assyrians, who were Shemites, the Persians, the Macedonians, and the Romans, who were all Japhethites. And in modern times it is well known that most of the nations of Europe traded in African slaves.—(*Murphy.*)

There never has been a son of Ham who has shaken a sceptre over the head of Japheth. Shem hath subdued Japheth, and Japheth hath subdued Shem, but Ham never subdued either. —(*Mede: quoted by Jacobus.*)

This prophecy did not fix the descendants of Ham in the bonds of an iron destiny, nor does it reveal a flaw in the equal ways of God. The Canaanites, on account of their wickedness, *deserved* Divine chastisements; and the prophecy does but signify what takes place by the operation of great moral laws.

The curse pronounced upon Ham, though terrible, did not affirm a perpetual doom, but was only to operate until the larger blessing and hope should be announced. Prophecy would yet unfold a brighter prospect when the Deliverer would come for all; and in the expansion of Messiah's empire, even "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." (Psa. lxviii. 31.)

Verse 26. As Shem was to possess

the redeeming name of God, we have a further advance in prophecy, setting forth the particular *race* whence the Messiah should come.

To preserve the name of God, and to be conscious of covenant relations with Him, is the true life of nations and of souls. All other greatness dies. The prophet breaks out in benediction on such.

There is a dark side, however, to this prophetic thought, as it implies that the two other families of mankind, at least for part of the period under the prophet's view, were estranged from the true and living God. History corroborates both aspects of this prophetic sentence for the space of 2,400 years. During the most part of this long period the holy Jehovah Omnipotent was unknown to the great mass of the Japhethites, Hamites, and even Shemites. And it was only by the special election and consecration of an individual Shemite to be the head of a peculiar people, and the father of the faithful, that He did not cease to be the God of even a remnant of Shem.—*(Murphy.)*

Shem holds the highest grade of honour. Therefore it is that Noah, in blessing him, expresses himself in praise of God, and dwells not upon the person. Whenever the declaration relates to some unusual and important pre-eminency, the Hebrews thus ever ascend to the praise of God. (Luke i. 68.)—*(Calvin.)*

Where God is truly Lord of His people, all adversaries are made subject to them. The Church shall in her appointed seasons triumph in God, and all enemies be laid under her foot.—*(Hughes.)*

Verse 27. Japheth was enlarged. 1. In his territory. He was the progenitor of the inhabitants of Europe, Asia, and America, with the exception of the region between the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, the Euxine, the Caspian, and the mountains beyond the Tigris, which was the dwelling of the Shemites. He had the colonising faculty—the disposition to push on his conquests far and wide. Shem was devoted to home and father—a conserver of the past—upholding the doctrine of standing still—possessing no spirit of adventure. 2. In his intellectual and active faculties. The metaphysics of the Hindoos, the philosophy of the Greeks, and the military skill of the Romans, bear witness. The race of Japheth have given birth to the science and civilisation of the world. Even religion, though born in the East, has received the greatest expansion and development in the West.

To Japheth it was given to elaborate and perfect that language in which it has pleased God to give His later revelation to mankind. The Greek language was through long ages being gradually fitted to be the most perfect vehicle for the mind of the Spirit.

Nations that did not possess the Divine name have yet contributed to the glory of that name. The consciousness of the indwelling of God, together with the possession of that active energy which applies spiritual principles to life, affords the conditions of the highest prosperity. It is God's indwelling and enlargement—the union of Shem and Japheth.

Human skill and activity without the grace of religion, however refined, is only intense worldliness. If Japheth would prosper in the highest degree, he must receive from Shem spiritual knowledge and the genius of devotion. Nothing else but Christianity can impart stability and nobleness to civilisation.

The blessing of Shem, or faith in salvation, shall avail for the good of Japheth, even as the blessing of Japheth, humanitarian culture, shall in the end avail for Shem. These two blessings are reciprocal, and it is one of the deepest signs of some disease in our times, that these two are in so many ways estranged from each other, even to the extent of open hostility. What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.—*(Lange.)*

When Alexander the Great conquered the Persians, he gave protection to the Jews. And when the Romans subdued the Greek monarchy, they befriended the chosen nation. In their time came the Messiah, and instituted that new form of the Church of the Old Testament, which not only retained the best part of the ancient people of God, but extended itself over the whole of Europe, the chief seat of Japheth; went with him wherever he went, and is at this day, through the blessing of God on his political and moral influence, penetrating into the moral darkness of Ham as well as the remainder of Shem and Japheth himself. Thus, in the highest of all senses, Japheth is dwelling in the tents of Shem.—(*Murphy*).

In that early age, what genius or foresight of man could have thus cast the horoscope of history? Surely the "seventh from Adam" spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost.

The bondage of Ham has been overruled for good in giving him the means of the knowledge of God. He has been brought thus within the influences of religion.

All human history is working towards that blessed end when mankind shall dwell in peace together, knowing and reverencing the name of God. The Church is the true home for mankind, and the highest style and ideal of social and national life.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 28, 29.

THE YEARS OF NOAH: THEIR SOLEMN LESSONS.

Here is the brief record of a noble life. There is little besides the simple numeration of years—merely a reference to the great event of Noah's history, and his falling at length under the common fate of all the race. This record, short as it is, teaches us some important lessons.

I. **The slow movements of Divine justice.** Before the flood the wickedness of man had grown so great that God threatened to cut short his appointed time upon the earth. His days were to be contracted to 120 years—a terrible reduction of the energy of human life when men lived nearly 1,000 years (Gen. vi. 3). But, from the instance of Noah, we find that this threat was not executed at once. Divine justice is stern and keen, but it is slow to punish.

II. **The energy of the Divine blessing.** God blessed man at the first, and endowed him with abundant measures of the spirit of life. Even when human iniquity required to be checked and punished by the curtailing of this gift, the energy of the old blessing suffered little abatement. God causes the power of that blessing still to linger among mankind. The hand of Divine goodness slackens but slowly in the bestowal of gifts to man. How often are the favours of Providence long continued to doomed nations and men! Underlying all God's dealings with men there is the strong power of redemption, which is the life of every blessing. That power will yet overcome the world's evil and subdue all things.

III. **God's provision for the education of the race.** When men depended entirely upon verbal instruction, and teachers were few, the long duration of human life contributed to the preservation and the extending of knowledge. But as the education of the world advanced, new sources of knowledge were opened and teachers multiplied, the necessity for long life in the instructors of mankind grew less. The provisions of God are wonderfully adjusted to human necessity.

IV. **An encouragement to patient endurance.** Here is one who bore the cross for the long space of 950 years. What a discipline in suffering as well as in doing the will of God! Time is the chief component among the forces that try patience, for patience is rather borne away by long trials than overwhelmed by the rolling wave. If tempted to murmur in affliction, or at our protracted contest with temptation and sin, let us think of those who have endured longer than we.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 28, 29. He lived accepted of God, promoted by Him, testifying against sin, preaching righteousness, giving laws from God to the generation wherein he was; and sometimes slipping into sin, and falling into bitter afflictions. He died a death beseeming such a man; he died a saint, a believer, a glorious instrument in Christ's Church, and so died in hope when by faith he had seen the promises.—*(Hughes.)*

CHAPTER X.

Critical Notes.—1. Generations] The origins, genesis, or **developments; a characteristic** note of this book. The whole chapter is a table of the nations which descended from the sons of Noah.—**2. Japheth]** "The order of the generations of the sons of Noah here followed is Japheth, Ham, Shem. The reason why this arrangement begins with Japheth is that he was the eldest of the three. Ham follows next, in order that the main subject, the line of Shem, may be free for treatment; the object of secondary interest having been first disposed of, according to the practice of the sacred writer" (*Alford*). There is a striking similarity between the name Japheth and the Iapetus, which the Greeks and Romans regarded as the progenitor of the human race. —**Gomer]** This name has been traced to the Cimmerians of Homer, and also to the Cymry, the national name of the Welsh. The name occurs in the Cimmerian Bosphorus—the Crimea. This people inhabited the N.W. portion of Japheth's territory; they are mentioned in Ezek. xxxviii. 6. —**Magog]** Identified with the Scythians—generally the north-eastern nations. "The chief people in the army of Gog (Ezek. xxxviii. 2, 3; xxxix. 1) is *Rosh*, that is, the Rossi, or Russians" (*Knobel*).—**Madai]** The Medes, inhabiting the S. and S.W. They became incorporated in the Persian Empire, hence the two nations are spoken of together.—**Javan]** The Ionians, or Greeks. —**Tubal and Meshech]** These names frequently occur together in the Old Testament. They are supposed to be identical with the *Tiberians*, inhabiting Pontus and the districts of Asia Minor generally.—**Tiras]** Probably the Thracians, dwellers on the River Tiras, or Dniester — **3. Ashkenaz]** Some suppose this name to designate the Asen race, which is said to be the origin of the Germans. "It is somewhat remarkable that the Jews, to this day, call Germany *Askenaz*" (*Alford*).—**Riphath]** Probably the Celts, who dwelt originally on the Riphœan, or Carpathian mountains.—**Togarmah]** The Arminians, whose first king was named Thorgom, and who still call themselves the House of Thorgom.—**4. Elishah]** Josephus and Knobel suppose that the Æolians are represented; others have traced the name to Hellas.—**Tarshish]** The Tyrseni, or Etruscans, colonised the east and south of Spain, and north of Italy.—**Kittim]** The original inhabitants of Cyprus, whose ancient capital was Citium, an old Greek town. Alexander the Great is said to have come out of the land of Chittim (1 Mac. I., 1; viii. 5).— **Dodanim]** The Dardanians, who in historic times inhabited Illyrium and Troy. **5. The isles of the Gentiles]** "would appear to include the coast of the Mediterranean. The word signifies not only island, but also any maritime tracts. The notice in this verse must evidently be regarded as anticipatory of chapter xi. 1" (*Alford*). The Jews applied the word, besides its strict sense, also to describe those countries which could only be conveniently reached by water.—**Every one after his tongue]** "Thus clearly evincing that this dispersion took place *after* the confusion of tongues, though related before it" (*Bush*).—**6. Cush]** This name designates the Ethiopians, also including the Southern Asiatics. Cush is generally rendered Ethiopia in the A. V.— **Mizraim]** The O. T. name for Egypt or the Egyptians.—**7. Seba]** "Meroe-Ethiopians living from Elephantine to Meroe. The prophets represent the accession of Seba to the Church of God as one of the glories of the latter-day triumphs (Ps. lxxii. 10).—Candace seems to have been the queen of this region" (Acts viii. 27.—*Jacobus.*)—**Sheba]** The Sabeans, dwelling on shores of the Persian Gulf. They are referred to as men of stature and of commercial importance, in Isa. xlv. 14.—**8. And Cush begat Nimrod]** "The historian here turns aside from the list of nations to notice the origin of the first great empires that were established on the earth. Of th sons of Cush, one is here noted as the first potentate in history" (*Jacobus*). "The occurrence of the name Jehovah marks the insertion as due to the Jehovist supplementer" (*Alford*).—**A mighty one in the earth]** A hero—a conqueror—the first founder of an empire.—**9. He was a mighty hunter]** "Taken in its primary sense, that this great conqueror was also a great follower of the chase, a pursuit which, as Delitzch remarks, 'has remained to this day, true to its origin, the favourite pleasure of tyrants'" (*Alford*).—**Before the Lord]** An expression denoting his eminent greatness. Some suppose that it refers to his defiance of Jehovah, and this interpretation is favoured by the meaning of his name—*let us rebel*.—**10. The beginning of his kingdom]** The first theatre of his sovereignty.—**Babel]** Babylon.—**11. Out of the land went forth Asshur]** A more probable rendering is, "He came forth to Asshur," *i.e.*, he extended his conquests from Shinar.—**12. The same is a great city]** "Knobel refers this to the whole four just mentioned, Nineveh, Rehoboth, Calah, and Resen; *these four places are the site which is named the great city*, viz., Nineveh in the wider sense. See Jonah iv. 11; iii. 3" (*Alford*).—**13-20. A continuation of the sons of Ham]** **21. The father of all the children of Eber]** "This declaration calls attention beforehand to the fact, that in the sons of Eber the Shemetic line of the descendants of Abraham separates again in Peleg, namely, from Joktan, or his Arabian descendants" (*Lange*).—**25. In his days was the earth divided]** These words have given rise to much speculation, but the more probable opinion is that they refer to the incident described in ch. xi.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPHS—*Verses* 1—32.

THE FIRST ETHNOLOGICAL TABLE.

Many readers might be disposed to undervalue a chapter like this, since it is but a collection of names—some of which are quite unknown—and is made up of barren details promising little material for profitable reflection. Yet a thoughtful reader will be interested here, and discover the germs and suggestions of great truths; for the subject is *man*, and man, too, considered in reference to God's great purpose in the government of the world. This chapter "is as essential to an understanding of the Bible, and of history in general, as is Homer's catalogue, in the second book of the Iliad, to a true knowledge of the Homeric poems and the Homeric times. The Biblical student can no more undervalue the one than the classical student the other." *(Dr. T. Lewis, in Lange's Genesis.)* Let us consider what are the chief characteristics and lessons of this, the oldest ethnological table in all literature.

I. It is marked by the features of a truthful record. 1. *It is not vague and general, but descends to particulars.* The forgers of fictitious documents seldom run the risk of scattering the names of persons and places freely over their page. That would expose them to detection. Hence those who write with fraudulent design deal in what is vague and general. This chapter mentions particulars of names and places, and, in this regard, has the marks of a genuine record. Heathen literature does not furnish so wide and universal a register. One cause why that literature is so deficient in documents of this nature lies in the fact that each heathen nation was shut up within itself, having little relations with others except those of trade and war. But this chapter is framed on a wider basis, is concerned with all races of men, however diversified, and contemplates the human family as having an essential unity under all possible varieties of character and external conditions. 2. *Heathen literature when dealing with the origin of nations employs extravagant language.* The early annals of all nations, except the Jews, run at length into fable, or else pretend to a most incredible antiquity. National vanity would account for such devices and for the willingness to receive them. The Jews had the same temptations to indulge in this kind of vanity as the other nations around them. It is therefore a remarkable circumstance that they pretend to no fabulous antiquity. We are shut up to the conclusion that their sacred records grew up under the special care of Providence, and were preserved from the common infirmities of merely human authorship. The sober statements of this chapter regarding the origin of nations is a presumption of their truth. 3. *Here we have the ground-plan of all history.* The physical, intellectual, moral, social, and religious forces represented here sufficiently account for all subsequent history. We have, in this sacred portion of history, a light to guide and inform us over those tracts of time where the records of other nations leave us in darkness. We learn further—

II. That history has its basis in that of individual men. We speak of God's relations to humanity, of the history of the world; but it will be found that this ultimately resolves itself into the history of individual men, who represent social and moral forces which have determined the currents of events. We find that God's successive revelations were made to depend upon the characters of individual men. The revelation of salvation itself ever tends to take this form. God did not reveal His plans of mercy, in their ever-expanding outline and detail, to large bodies of men, but to individuals whom He deemed worthy of such sacred communications. It is not therefore strange that single human lives occupy so large a portion of Scripture. All history was to issue in One who would be the flower of humanity; and in whom alone the race could be contemplated with any joy of hope. The general lesson of this chapter is plain, namely, that no man can go to the bottom of history who does not study the lives of those men who have made that history what it is.

III. That man is the central figure in Scripture. The Bible differs, in one important feature, from the sacred books of other nations. They lose themselves in endless theories and speculations concerning the origin of the material universe. They have minute and elaborately detailed systems of cosmogony, geography, and astronomy. Hence the advance of the human mind in natural knowledge must be fatal to their authority. But the Bible commits itself to no detailed description of the laws and phenomena of nature. One short chapter in it is deemed sufficient to tell us that God made the heavens and the earth The world is only considered as it is a habitation for man, and the platform on which the Supreme works out His great designs. Man is regarded in Scripture not merely as part of the furniture of this planet, but as lord of all. Everything is put under his feet. Hence the sacred records describe a God of men rather than a God of nature. They give a history of man as distinct from nature. Infidels have made this characteristic of revelation a matter of reproach; but all who know how rich God's purpose towards mankind is, glory in it, and believe that great things must be in store for a race which has occupied so much of the Divine regard.

IV The progressive movement of history towards an end. No history is marked by signs of living power that does not advance towards some great and noble end. In the highest things, how aimless have been the histories of the chief nations of mankind! Some particulars of Bible history may be regarded as unimportant, and even contemptible, when compared with the more stately and dignified records of the nations around; yet they show the onward march of humanity towards an end. They show how that humanity was gravitating towards its centre in Shem, Abraham, and Christ. How soon does the sacred history leave many of the great names recorded here—some of them founders of great empires; and important forces, as the world accounts—and proceeds to the delineation of individual lives which in the grey dawn and morning of the world reflect the light of the Sun of Righteousness! The great nations of the earth are afterwards little noticed, except when for a moment they are brought into some relation with the chosen people. The reason of this peculiarity is, that the Bible is not a world-history, but a history of the kingdom of God. All the interest centres successively in one *people, tribe,* and *family;* then in one who was to come out of that family, bringing redemption for mankind. "Salvation is of the Jews." The noblest idea of history is only realised in the Bible. Those of the world had no living Word of God to inspire that idea. That book can scarcely be regarded as of human origin which passes by the great things of the world, and lingers with the man who "believed in God. and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE CHAPTER.

In this chapter we see the origin of many nations in all parts of the world, and therefore the power of the blessing which God, after the flood, had renewed to men in respect to their multiplying and propagation; and so, finally, we learn the fathers from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. Neither Noah nor his sons begat any offspring during the time of the flood. The same may be conjectured to be true of the animals which were shut up with him in a dark dungeon, and as it were in the midst of death.—(*Starke.*)

In this outline of the history of all nations, we have a suggestion of the universality of God's gracious purposes towards mankind. Heaven will draw inhabitants from every kingdom, people, nation, and tongue.

The relation between the history of God's kingdom and the world-history: 1. The contract; 2. the connection; 3. the unity (in its wider sense is the whole world's history a history of the kingdom of God).—(*Lange.*)

The fifth document relates to the generations of the sons of Noah. It presents first a genealogy of the nations, and then an account of the distribution of mankind into nations, and their dispersion over the earth. This is the last section which treats historically of the whole human race. Only in incidental, didactic, or prophetic passages do we again meet with mankind as a whole in the Old Testament.–(*Murphy.*)

This chapter illustrates one stage of advance in the development of the human race. The family grows into the nation. The history reaches from Noah to Abraham, who is the representative of all the children of faith. Hence arises the Church, the highest form of life, the home for all mankind, however diversified in country, race, or tongue.

Though the race of man, as a whole, now disappears from the sacred page, yet in the progress of God's revelation to man we are led on to Christ, in whom all things and men that have been sundered and scattered shall be gathered together.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON SPECIAL PORTIONS.

Verse 1. Note the connection of this with the former history. Noah had prophesied before concerning all his sons, and then was added his expiration, the Spirit meaning to speak no more of him: but now, that being done, He proceeds to show the persons and posterity upon whom all these words were to be fulfilled. God's word must not fall to the ground. God's prophecies and performances are joined together in His word, so they should be in our faith and observation.—(*Hughes.*)

Verse 5. The Scripture, foreseeing that Europe would, from the first, embrace the Gospel, and for many ages be the principal seat of its operations, the Messiah Himself is introduced by Isaiah as addressing Himself to its inhabitants—"Listen, *O isles*, unto Me; and hearken ye people from afar. Jehovah hath called Me from the womb, and hath said unto Me, It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob. I will also give Thee for a light to the *Gentiles*, that Thou shouldest be My salvation to the end of the earth" (Is. xlix. 1–6). Here we see not only the first peopling of our native country, but the kind remembrance of us in the way of mercy, and this, though far removed the means of salvation. What a call is this to us who occupy what is denominated *the end of the earth*, to be thankful for the Gospel, and to listen to the sweet accents of the Saviour's voice.—(*Fuller.*)

It was God's plan that men should be divided and dispersed all over the earth, and He has Himself determined the bounds of their habitation.

In their nations. We note here the characteristics of a nation—1. It is descended from one head. Others may be occasionally grafted on the original stock by inter-marriage. But there is a vital union subsisting between all the members and the head, in consequence of which the name of the head is applied to the whole body of the nation. 2. A nation has a country or "land" which it calls its own. In the necessary migrations of ancient tribes, the new territories appropriated by the tribe, or any part of it, were naturally called by the old name, or some other name belonging to the old country. 3. A nation has its own "tongue." This constitutes at once its unity in itself, and its separation from others. Many of the nations in the table may have spoken cognate tongues, or even originally the same tongue. But it is a uniform law that one nation has only one speech within itself. 4. A nation is composed of many "families," clans, or tribes. These branch off from the nation in the same manner as it did from the parent stock of the race.—(*Murphy.*)

Verse 9. The original term for "hunting" occurs elsewhere, not so much in reference to the pursuit of game in the forest, as to a violent invasion of the persons and rights of men. Thus 1 Sam. xxiv. 11, "Thou huntest my soul (*i.e.* my life) to take it." This usage undoubtedly affords us a key to Nimrod's true character; though probably, like most of the heroes of remote classical antiquity addicted to the hunting of wild beasts, yet his bold, aspiring, arrogant spirit rested not content with this mode of displaying his prowess. With the band of adventurous and lawless spirits which his predatory skill had gathered around him, he proceeded gradually from hunting beasts to assaulting, oppressing, and subjugating his fellow-men. That the inhuman practice of war, at least in the ages after the flood, originated with this daring usurper, is in the highest degree probable.

"Proud Nimrod first the bloody chase began,
A mighty hunter—and his prey was man."

(*Bush.*)

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IX.

BY

REV. WM. ADAMSON.

Noachic Covenant! Ver. 1-17. We have here (1) Principle of Government, as God's institution for the good of His saints; (2) Promulgation of Covenant, as God's instruction to mankind of an everlasting covenant in Christ; and (3) Proclamation of Rainbow, as God's intimation of His faithfulness, in which no arrow shall ever find a place. There are men who can see no lofty aim in this chapter ix., and who only see the abstract moral principle of right and wrong, virtue and vice Like the first visitors to the coral lagoons they can only perceive a sheet of water; whereas deep down are the pearl-treasures—the gems of great price. Dost thou well

"To challenge the designs of the All-wise;
Or carp at projects which thou may'st but scan
With sight defective: typal contrivances
Of peerless skill and of unequalled art,
Framed by divinest wisdom to subserve
The subtle processes of grace!"

Representation! Ver. 1. (1) In the earnest fauna and flora of the earth, one class stood for many. The earliest families combined the character of several families afterwards separately introduced. This is true, for instance, of ferns, which belong to the oldest races of vegetation. Of them it has been well said that there is hardly a single feature or quality possessed by flowering plants, of which we do not find a hint or prefiguration in ferns. It is thus most interesting to notice in the earliest productions of our earth, the same laws and processes which we observe in the latest and most highly developed flowers and trees. (2) At the successive periods of the unfolding of God's great promise, we find one individual representing the history of the race, and foreshadowing in brief the essential character of large phases and long periods of human development. Hence it is that here Noah becomes the representative of the patriarchal families in covenant with God. He is the individual with whom God enters into covenant, in relation to the successive generations of the human race. (3) And in this respect Noah is a *retrospective* type of Him who, in the eternal ages, consented to be the representative of redeemed humanity, and with whom the Father made an everlasting covenant; and a *prospective* type of that same Representative who, in the fulness of time received the Divine assurance that in Him should all nations of the earth be blessed, when, as the Prince of Peace, He

"Leads forth His armies with triumphal palms
And hymning hallelujahs, while His foes
Are crushed before Him, and Himself assumes
The sceptre of His rightful universe."

Bible Revision! Ver. 1, etc. (1) The last four verses of chap. viii. properly belong to chap. ix. In any future revision, these 4 verses, along with the first 17 verses of chap. ix., should be united in one chapter. The sweet-smelling savour is intimately connected with the Divine declaration of man's future. As we link the blessings of humanity for the last 2000 years with the sweet-smelling sacrifice of Calvary, so should we join the future of man (as in verses 1-17) with the Noachic sacrifice so acceptable to God. (2) And as the ark cast upon the stormy floods was divinely designed to be a type of that other and better ark, sheltering man from the wrath divine; so that sweet and odorous offering, with its succeeding stream of divine benediction, was a divinely-appointed symbol of the nobler victim on a holier mount,

"The fragrance of whose perfect sacrifice
Breathes infinite beatitude, and spans
The clouds of judgment with eternal light."

Man's Lordship! Ver. 2. In India, a man-eating tiger sprang upon a group of men resting in the shade. Grasping with his teeth one of the group, he sprang off into the jungle, while the rest of the natives scattered hither and thither. The following day, a maiden, returning from the fountain, met the same tiger. Fastening her eye firmly upon that of the tiger, she boldly advanced to the beast, which suddenly turned and fled into the thickets. God thus shows what sin has done in destroying man's lordship over the creature. No doubt, had man under the Noachic covenant walked with God, the fear of man and the dread of man would have been upon every beast of the field, and upon every fowl of the air. It was the same lion, which seized the soldier by the camp-fire, which next day fled precipitately from the form of a little child, as it stood staring with childish wonderment at the strange creature that stepped across the path leading to the Missionary's compound. In that retreating monarch of the wild from the shining eye of childhood, we have a relic, not of man's Adamic, but of man's Noachic, dominion over the beasts of the forest, who slunk away

"With muttered growls, and sought their
lonesome dens,
Gliding, like cowering ghosts with baffled
mien,
Into the dark, deep forest."—*Collingwood.*

Blood for Blood! Ver. 6. An English tourist came upon an Indian village, in centre of which a number of youths were playing. Provoked in play, one lost his temper, and, suddenly seizing a knife, struck his opponent in the neck. The wound, though not dangerous, bled profusely, and a cry was immediately raised. A young chief came forth from his hut—inquired the cause—and, having ascertained the culprit, started in pursuit of him. Soon overtaken, the guilty youth was dragged to where the wounded one lay. After carefully examining the depth, extent, etc., of the wound, the young chief took a knife and made precisely the same incision in the offender's neck. The one was a papyrographic fac-simile of the other. Both were then taken to their huts. This Indian chief was the "Goel;" *i.e.*, the avenger of the injured;

"Poising the cause in justice' equal scales,
Whose beam stands sure, whose rightful
cause prevails."—*Shakespeare.*

Nature-Symbolism! Ver. 12-17. (1) All Nature, says Leale, is a mighty parable of spiritual truth. To the attentive ear, all the earth is eloquent; to the reflecting mind, all Nature is symbolical. Each object has a voice which reaches the inner ear, and speaks lessons of wise and solemn import. The stream murmurs unceasingly its secrets; the sibylline breeze in mountain glens and lonely forests sighs forth its oracles. We are told that the invisible things of God, from the beginning of the world, are clearly seen; being understood by the things that are made. From the very first, a spiritual significance was embodied in the physical forms and processes of the universe. Nature, as a whole, was meant to be for man the vesture of the spiritual world. (2) But, in addition to this, God takes one of these symbols in nature, and, as it were, consecrates it to new use—appropriates to it new and refreshing spiritual significance. He seizes upon an existing phenomenon, which, as Wordsworth says, had hitherto been but a beautiful object-lesson shining in the heavens, when the sun's rays descended on falling rain, and consecrates it as the sign of His love to man.

"And thus, fair bow, no fabling dreams,
But words of the Most High
Have told why first thy robe of beams
Was woven in the sky;
When o'er the green, undeluged earth
Heaven's covenant thou didst shine."

Rainbow! Ver 13. If a boy, says Newton, has a ball, and wishes to know what it is made of, he takes it to pieces; and in the same way we can take the sunlight to pieces, and find out of what it is made. Go into a room which has a window towards the west where the sun is shining. Close the shutters, after boring a hole in the shutter large enough to insert your finger. A beam of sunlight comes through that hole. Hold a prism, *i.e.*, a three-cornered piece of glass, so that the shaft of light falls upon it. Before that beam enters the prism, it is white; but in going through the glass it is broken up and taken to pieces. It comes out in seven different colours. Now, whenever the rainbow appears, this is the way in which it is made. God has been breaking up the light. He uses not the prism of glass, but the drops of falling rain.

"When thou dost shine, darkness looks white and fair;
Forms turn to music, clouds to smiles and air;
Rain gently spreads his honey-drops, and pours
Balm on the cleft earth, milk on grass and flowers."

Covenant Rainbow! Ver. 13. (1) The beautiful rainbow, in which all the seven prismatic colours are blended together in sweet and graceful proportion, is declared to be an emblem of His covenant with His people. And as the seven-fold colours thus sweetly blend in harmony of grace, so in His covenant every attribute of God is exhibited in its infinite perfection, and in it they all beautifully and gloriously harmonise together. (2) This comes out in Ezek. i. 27, where we are told by Ezekiel that, in the vision vouchsafed to him of Christ upon the mercy seat in the heavens, as the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. If this symbolises anything, surely it symbolises the excellent grace and surpassing harmony of the Divine attributes in the covenant of Christ.

"When I behold thee, though my light be dim,
Distant, O bow, I can in thine see Him
Who looks upon thee from His glorious throne,
And minds the covenant betwixt All and One."

Divine Action! Ver. 13. (1) Not only is the cloud necessary, but also the sunlight. The dark cloud is of itself utterly powerless to give birth to the smiling arch of light. The bright rays of the sun are requisite to paint its glowing colours on the dark background. The sun must kiss the dark face of the storm-cloud with his lips, before it can become wreathed with beauty. The cloud alone can make no rainbow glitter on its breast; but the moment the light darts through the gloom and kisses with its golden rays the threatening cloud—*that very moment*, a belt of light encircles the cloud. (2) In the Christian-like sky, the clouds of sorrow and affliction are an essential element of Divine discipline, for there drop from the clouds the raindrops of invigorating refreshment. But those clouds have on their breast no bright light of truth and faithfulness, except the Sun of Righteousness dart His enlightening beams. It is when Jesus smiles upon our cloud-woes, that the eye of the soul beholds the eternal iris of grace of truth, and as it beholds adores Him who says, "I, the Sun of Righteousness, do set My bow in the cloud."

"Oft, O Lord! Thy azure heaven
Did grey rainy vapours shroud,
Till at last in colours seven,
Shone Thy brow upon the cloud;
Then, for saving mercies there,
I, on my steep mount of care,
Altar built for thankful prayer."
Gerok.

Rainbow-Myths! Ver. 14. It was a beautiful superstition which maintained that, wherever the glittering feet of the rainbow rested, there a hidden treasure would be discovered. And some foolishly set out in quest of this hidden treasure, wandering far and wide, only to find fairy gold—a glow of beauty which vanished ever and anon the nearer they approached it. But there was mystic truth in the fable. Where the magic hues lay, there the dull soil brightened into fruitfulness. Golden harvest—the only true riches of earth—sprang up, and rewarded those who sought wealth, not in idle, superstitious wanderings, but by steady, trustful industry, in those spots where the feet of the bow of promise touched the earth. Macmillan says that our cornfields grow and ripen seemingly under that covenant-arch, whose keystone is in the heavens, and whose foundations are upon the earth. And surely it is beneath the feet of the "Faithful and True Witness" (Rev. i.) that the golden harvest of redeemed ones, to be reaped by His angels, spring up, under the genial showers of the Holy Spirit of Grace. So that when God set His opal rainbow in the clouds He made it a teacher of the great harvest of grace, as well as

"A token when His judgments are abroad
Of His perpetual covenant of peace."

Rainbow! Ver. 15. God was pleased to adopt the known and most beautiful, as well as welcome token of a retiring storm, as the sign of His covenant of mercy. And thus, in the visions of heaven, the throne of God is over-arched by a rainbow, and a rainbow is displayed as a diadem above the head of Christ (Rev. x. 1). Whenever we see a rainbow, let us (1) Call to mind that it is God's bow seen in the cloud; (2) Conclude that, in His darkest dispensations, there is ever a gracious purpose towards us; and (3) Consider that all warnings of wrath to come are accompanied with offers of pardon to the penitent. It is a suggestive fact that the rainbow is never seen except in a cloud from which the rain is at the same time falling. So that if the shower reminds us of the flood, the bow in that same shower-cloud shall remind us of the Covenant:—

> 'A dewy cloud, and in the cloud a bow,
> Conspicuous, with three tinted colours gay,
> Betokening peace with God, and covenant new." *Milton.*

Apocalyptic Rainbow! Ver. 16. (1) In St. John's local description of the celestial presence chamber, he tells us of his initial glance into the heaven of heavens. The august throne of Deity arrests his gaze. It has been rightly remarked that, combining the description in Rev. iv. with others which follow, this grandest of visions consists in the manifestation of God as the God of Redemption. We have Jehovah seated on the throne—the Lamb in the midst of the throne—and the seven lamps or torches before the throne. The throne itself has the three primary colours; while encircling all was the rainbow. (2) As in Ezekiel's vision by the banks of Chebar, the appearance of the glory of the Lord was encircled by the appearance of the bow in the cloud, to assure him to fear nothing of Babylon or Assyria, inasmuch as He who sat enthroned above the complications and seeming confusions of earth was *faithful and true;* so to the Seer of Patmos was vouchsafed a similar assurance, "I do set my bow in the cloud." He saw God, in His covenant aspect, as the God of salvation—His throne encompassed with the emerald iris—

> "Beautiful bow! A brighter one
> Is shining round th' eternal throne!
> And when life's little storm is o'er,
> May I gaze on this bow for evermore."
> *Watson.*

Everlasting Covenant! Ver. 16. The rainbow of the covenant of grace lasts for ever; it never melts. The one on which Noah gazed soon lost its brilliancy. Fainter and fainter still it grew, until, like a coloured haze, it just quivered in the air, and then faded from the vision. Ten thousand rainbows since have arched our earth, and then melted in the clouds; but the rainbow of God's mercy in Christ abides for ever. It shines with undiminished splendour from all eternity, and its brilliancy will dazzle the eyes of redeemed humanity through the countless cycles of the same eternity. As has been said by Guthrie, it gleams in heaven to-night, yea, it beams sweetly on earth with harmonious hues, mellowed and blended into each other as fresh as ever. And when the sun has run his course and given place unto eternity, that bow of grace will still remain for ever, and be the theme of the ceaseless songs of spirits glorified in heaven, as, wrapt in the radiance of that sinless, sunless land, they realise that the darkness of earth was but the shadow of God's wing sheltering them from earth's too scorching sun

> "As fresh as yon horizon dark,
> As young thy beauties seem,
> As when the eagle from the ark
> First sported in thy beam."

Climate-Influences! Ver. 18, 19. (1) It is a remarkable fact that insects partake of the colours of the trees upon which they dwell. Some look so exactly like slender dead twigs covered with bark, that their insect nature can only be discovered by mere accident. Some resemble living things, and are green. Others resemble such as are decayed, and are brown. The wings of many put on the resemblance of dry and crumpled leaves; whilst those of others are a vivid green, in exact accordance with the plants they respectively inhabit. (2) Although in the torrid zone, we hardly ever meet with a single aboriginal species of plant or animal common to both hemispheres, yet the analogy of climate everywhere produces analogous organic forms. Thus, on surveying the feathered tribes of America, we are not only struck by their singularity of shape or mode of life, but by the fact that they bear striking resemblance to the feathered tribes in Asia, Africa, and Australia. (3) As with insects, so with man. He is not less affected by the place of his habitation on the earth. His face in colour answers more or less to the hue of the tree-trunks, etc.; therefore to understand any people thoroughly we must know something of the country in which they live. And as with the birds of all tropical lands—they bear a resemblance more or less to each other in shape and characteristics—so with the human race. The dwellers in temperate climes, however widely sundered by seas and mountain ranges, have more or less of analogy one to the other; and these adaptations and analogies of man to climate have one voice. They tell us of the Divine design and declaration in vers. 18 and 19. They give us food for fruitful meditation in their folio volume,

> "which we may read, and read,
> And read again, and still find something new
> Something to please, and something to instruct."

Vine Fables! Ver. 20. The Germans fable that an angel visited the earth some time after the subsidence of the Deluge. He discovered Noah sitting at noon under the shade of a fig tree, looking very disconsolate. Inquiring the cause of Noah's grief, he was told that the heat was oppressive—so oppressive that he wanted something to drink. The angel thereupon pointed to the rippling streams, sparkling fountains flowing around, and said, "Drink, and be refreshed." But Noah replied that he could not drink of these waters, because so many strong men, beautiful women, innocent children, and countless animals had been drowned in them by the flood. The fable goes on to tell how the angel then spread his white wings—flew up to heaven swift as a lightning flash, and returned with some vine shoots, which he taught Noah to plant and tend. This has no doubt as much truth as that other fable, which represents Satan as killing a lamb, a monkey, a lion, and a pig, and then, pouring their blood upon a vine, watched to see with glee their effects upon Noah. Lucretius puts it thus:

"Dire was his thought, who first in poison steeped
The weapon formed for slaughter—direr his,
And worthier condemnation, who instilled
The mortal venom in the social cup,
To fill the veins with death instead of life."
—*Dryden.*

Vineyards! Ver. 20. It is a beautiful sight to see the mountain sides of Hermon and Lebanon so neatly terraced, cultivated, and dressed with the vine. What our apple-orchards are in England, that—and much more—are the vineyards in the East. They perform for the Syrians a greater variety of purposes in their dietetic economy than our orchards do for us. Vineyards can thus be looked upon with delight; and God's blessing can be invoked upon them. The scene is not one which suggests drunken revelry and excess. And the longing of the traveller is that those old, hoary mountains may again be terraced from base to summit with vineyards, and that the valleys may re-echo with the voice of the watchman, whose call in the vineyard to his fellow is, "Watchman, what of the night?" 'Tis enough to make

"The sad man merry, the benevolent one
Melt into tears—so general is the joy!
While up and down the cliffs, over the lake,
Wains oxen-drawn, and pannier'd mules are seen,
Laden with grapes, and dripping rosy wine."
—*Rogers.*

Vine! Ver. 20. Macmillan says that the vine is one of the most extensively diffused of plants. In this respect it furnishes a beautiful emblem of the universal spread of the Christian Church. Its early history is involved in obscurity. It is as old as the human race. Its cultivation was probably amongst the earliest efforts of human industry. It is first introduced to our notice as the cause of Noah's drunkenness. It is believed to be originally a native of the hilly region on the southern shores of the Caspian sea, and of the Persian Gulf of Ghilan. The Jews have a tradition that it was first planted by God's own hand on the fertile slopes of Hebron. There is another tradition, that Noah's sons, travelling westward, brought it with them to Canaan. The early culture of the vine in Egypt is proved by the paintings on the tombs of that land, where the different processes of wine-making are fully portrayed, and appear to be far more extended than the simple practice of squeezing the juice from the grape. These Egyptian pictures recall the poet's words:—

"The vines in light festoons
From tree to tree—the trees in avenues,
And every avenue and cover'd walk
Hung with ripe clusters."

Wine and Heat! Ver. 20. (1) In the East the sherbet of the winter and spring is made of orange blossoms. It is very sweet, rich in perfume, and pleasant to the native palate; but it is not very refreshing. It is, therefore, not adapted for the summer, for the hot July weather compels the stomach to crave an acid by way of refreshment. In July the natives begin to use the green grape, by pounding it to a pumice in a mortar. Strained, sweetened, and diluted with water, it furnishes a drink which rivals our best lemonade, and which the mountaineer employs as a substitute. In August and September the grapes are used for making molasses, wines, vinegars, and jellies. These are invaluable auxiliaries in the hot climates of the East. (2) It is the Lord Jesus who says, "I am the True Vine." His precious blood is the vitalising juices of the Church and her true members; while the ripe fruit-clusters of that precious blood afford cooling refreshment to the fevered hearts of the servants of God in this hot, noontide life. As the Syrian says that there is no drink like that of the July vine, and no fruit like that of the August grape, so the children of God say that there is no blood like that of the True Vine, and no fruit like that of His atonement.

"Lord of the Vineyard, we adore
That power and grace Divine
Which plants our wild and barren souls
In Christ the Living Vine."

Use and Abuse! Ver. 20, 21. On the fertile island of Chios lived, in ancient times, a noble and generous man, who had come from Asia, and built himself a house not far from the sea. On the sunny hills he had planted grapes, the delicious fruit of his native country. The vines prospered beyond expectation, and yielded the rich wine of Chios. The pious husbandman gave his wine to the rich and suffering, and they blessed the giver and his gift. One day a great tempest drove a ship among the rocks, but the sailors and officers escaped to shore

Here they were hospitably entertained. The wounded received wine, slumbered, and awoke strengthened and refreshed. But the sailors took too much wine—quarrelled—fought, and slew each other. The hospitable owner was indignant, and said, "Go back, ye evil doers, to the sea, for ye are not worthy to live on the land." Then, turning to the sailors restored and refreshed, he said, "You see, that as the sun which ripens the grape, and whose lustre beams from its gold, engenders the pernicious miasma when he darts his rays on corruption, so men may misuse the gifts of Nature to their own destruction: therefore, chain thy passions down"—

> "For if once we let them reign,
> They sweep with desolating train—
> 'Till they but leave a hated name,
> A ruined soul, and blackened fame."
> —*Cook.*

Drink and Drunkenness! Ver. 20. It is related of a converted Armenian on the Harpoot mission-field, that he was a strong temperance man. On one occasion, disputing with a drinker of the native wine, he was met with the rejoinder, "Did not God make grapes?" To this, with native warmth, the Armenian replied: "God made dogs; do you eat them? God made poisons; do you suck them?" While not prepared to argue after this fashion, all must admit the appalling follies of excessive drinking. Thomas Watson says that there is no sin which more defaces God's image than drunkenness. And sadly as it mars and blots the face and form of the body, its deleterious and destructive influences upon the mental powers and moral principles are more distressing. "Alcohol is a good creature of God, and I enjoy it," said a drinker to James Mowatt. To this he replied, "I dare say that rattlesnakes, boa-constrictors, and alligators are good creatures of God, but you do not enjoy swallowing them by the half-dozen." As Guthrie says, "No doubt, in one sense, it is a creature of God; and so are arsenic, oil of vitriol, and prussic acid. People do not toss off glasses of prussic acid, and call it a creature of God"—

> "Ah! false fiend,
> In whose perfidious eye damnation lurks,
> A chalice in his hand of sparkling wine
> Whereof who drinks must die; and on his lip
> Kisses and smiles, and everlasting woe."
> —*Bickersteth.*

Noah's Nakedness! Ver. 21. Noah was perfect in his generation. Canova's marble plinth was perfect in comparison with many other marble blocks, veined with glaring flaws. Noah's wealth and conversation were far above the lives and hearts of his day and generation. It was not absolute perfection, such as may be predicated of an angel. This explains his subsequent fall. By his very singularity and prominence he attracts attention—standing alone among millions, a solitary monument of glory amid universal disgrace. But the "Canova" eye of Infinite Purity perceives the flaw. How sad to read, after the noble testimony borne to his character—after witnessing the terrible infliction of judgment, that Noah was drunken. It (1) Shows how frail man is at his best; (2) Suggests how dependent he is on Divine grace; (3) Solaces the groaning believer, fearful of everlasting exclusion for sin; and (4) Stigmatises all phases and developments of sensual pleasure as branches of that upas-tree which God hates. Habits of intemperance strip off one's clothes and property, and uncover, disclose their mental and moral state.

> "Our pleasant vices
> Are made the whip to scourge us!"
> —*Shakespeare.*

Saints' Sins! Ver. 21. (1) As the photographic art will not make the homely beautiful, nor catch a landscape without catching the shadow of deformity as readily as the shadow of beauty; so, says Swing, the historic genius of the Bible gathers up all virtue and vice equally, and transfers it to the record—the one for human as divine commendation—the other for human as divine condemnation. And thus it comes to pass that we do not see a Hebrew nation adorned in the gay robes of a modern fresco, but one that sinned against God: a beacon tower of warning to all future nations of the earth that the Merciful and All-gracious will by no means clear the guilty. (2) When the painters of the last century painted the great heroes of that age, they threw upon their subjects the costumes of that day; and now, when in our days their dresses seem ridiculous and create a smile, we rise above the dress—fasten our eye upon the firm-set lips, the chiselled nose and noble forehead, and bless God that we have such portraits of such giants. Just so in the Bible, its great heroes are all represented in the clothes they wore—from Noah, in the cloak of drunkenness, to Peter, in the robe of equivocation: and it is for us to let those garments alone and admire the matchless contour of their spiritual countenances,

> "Pure and unspotted as the cleanly ermine,
> Ere the hunter sullies her with his pursuit."
> —*Davenant.*

Filial Reverence! Ver. 23. (1) Lettice would quietly watch for her father, and as quietly lead him home, that none of the neighbours might see his shame as a drunkard. With what tenderness she led the reeling form within doors; and when he had flung himself upon his poor bed, how tenderly she covered him, ere she herself retired to rest. She could not bear the thought of friends around knowing that her father lived to drink. (2) Joe Swayne, the street Arab, had been lured to Sunday School by a teacher on her way. In conversation he had mocked over his mother's propensity for drink, and jocosely described her words and ways when she returned to their wretched garret after a deep debauch. At school, God's word taught and God's grace trained him to think otherwise. Child could not be kinder to mother than he was. No one ever heard him mention his mother's shame. They could not honour, yet they would not dishonour.

"My father! my mother! how true should I prove!
How well should I serve you, how faithfully love!"

Afterwards! Ver. 24. Deep within an adjoining forest was a dell, where the beams of the sun scarcely ever penetrated. Tall trees grew on either side, whose branches, meeting above, formed a canopy of leaves, where the birds built their nests, and poured forth happy songs. Here the awakened drunkard bent his steps. It had been his favourite haunt in the days of his childhood; and as he threw himself upon the soft green sward, the recollections of past scenes came crowding over his mind. He thought of the narrow escape he had had but a few weeks before, when the mountain floods turned the river and swept away houses and neighbours, his own home and family narrowly escaping. He covered his face with his hands and groaned deeply. Suddenly a soft arm was thrown round his neck, and a sweet voice resounded in his ear, "God will forgive you, father." What were Noah's feelings when he awoke from his drunken sleep? He was the *penitent* first, the *prophet* afterwards.

"Deep in his soul conviction's ploughshare rings,
And to the surface his corruption brings;
He loathes himself, in lowest dust he lies,
And all abased, 'Unclean! unclean!' he cries."
—*Holmes.*

Nazarite Abstinence! Ver. 24. Law remarks that, as no juice of the grape, from kernel unto husk, was to pass the consecrated lips of the Nazarite, so Christians should sedulously flee whatever, like the juice of grape, may tend to weaken the firm energy, or stir up the sleeping brood of sensual and ungodly lusts. Touch not the kernel, nor the husk. Flee not strong potions only, but all that may insidiously corrupt the taste. Avoid them. They are the cancer's touch. They are the weed's first seed. Rapidly they grow—fatally they spread—mightily they strengthen—and soon they pervade the enervated soul. And as

"In some fair virgin's bosom a small spot,
As if a thorn had prick'd the delicate skin,
Rises and spreads an ever-fretting sore,
Creeping from limb to limb, corrosive, foul,
Until the miserable leper lives
A dying life, and dies a living death."
—*Bickersteth.*

Wine-Woes! Ver. 25. "A glass of wine did it." Such was the close of a traveller's narrative. A partner in one of the largest New York houses, he was now striving to earn a scanty livelihood as a commercial traveller. One of the partners had gone south to collect large sums due to the firm. He was successful in his purpose, and arrived at New Orleans on his way home. He ventured to drink wine, contrary to custom—became drunk—and in his sleep was robbed of all. Next day the telegraph brought the news; the firm became bankrupt; the families of the partners were broken up and separated. Some of the children lost their education—some of them mixed with street Arabs—and one of them died prematurely on the scaffold. The present generations of descendants are suffering more or less from that one glass of wine. Noah's over-indulgence has touched the whole sea of Ham's family life downwards, even as the pebble cast into the pool ripples and ruffles in ever-widening circles the whole surface of the water.

"Oh! fatal drinking! oh! accursed draught!
Ye stained the streams of time with shame and death!
No crystal streamlet from the fountain flows,
The source is tinged with crime, and stained with woes."
—*Mark.*

Human Race! Ver. 27. In the history of each of these great divisions of mankind, the characteristic sentence of Noah—legibly inscribed at the present time upon the nations that respectively owe their origin to Shem, Ham, and Japhet—it seems impossible to refuse our assent to the inspiration of Moses. As Redford remarks, "No impostor, and no mere philosopher, would have ventured upon such sweeping sentences—views so general—characteristics so peculiar." The correspondences between the historical facts and the written record are such as no ingenuity—no penetration, no calculation of human reason—could have anticipated. (1) Who could have foreseen—at the age at which we are sure Moses wrote—that the Africans would not emerge and become the conquerors of Europe? Yet Moses plainly declares here that they should not. (2) Or, who could have predicted that the Asiatics, then comprising all the mighty empires, and almost all the civilised world, would not overrun and subdue all the rest? Yet Moses plainly declares here that they should not. (3) Or, who could have determined that the Japhet race of Europe, then as uncivilised and degraded as Africa is now, should become the predominant section of mankind, vanquish the vast empires of the East, dwell in the tents of Shem, and make Africa its servant? Yet Moses plainly declares here that they should. Therefore we have a choice between the fancy that verses 26, 27, have been written within the last century, and the fact that He who knows the end from the beginning

"Pre-ordered and announced the ebb and flow
Of nations and of tribes—offspring of Noah's sons."

Noah's Death! Ver. 28, 29. The Jews have a myth of Noah, that on his deathbed he ordered his children to bring him wine sparkling in a beautiful cup. Holding it in his hand, he spoke to them of the vine. Let the vine be an emblem to you of your dignity, for it is full of weakness. (1) Yet, as it creeps in the dust until the elm tree offers its aid, and then rises and gains strength by twining itself around the branches, so man is weak until he twines himself round the outstretched arm of God. (2) Again, as the firm tree offers its supporting branches to the humble vine, in order that its hundred tendrils may wreathe themselves upwards nearer heaven, so God graciously offers His mighty arm for man's soul to entwine his affections heavenward. (3) Again as the vine draws its nourishment of life from the earth, while on high it forms the coarser material into the leaf, and blossom, and refreshing grape, so should man. For as the vine needs light from above to pervade and invigorate, so man's heart requires God's light to stablish it. Then Noah gave them each the cup of wine; then drank thereof himself, and died.

"No further seek his merits to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode;
There they abide in trembling hope repose,
The bosom of his Father and his God."
—*Southey.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER X

BY THE

REV. WM. ADAMSON.

Scripture Strata! Ver. 1-31. (1) Geologists have found great truths embedded in the earth's strata. Enduring traces left behind by the eruption of the volcano and the tranquil lapse of the waves on the beach—faint but indelible footprints of creatures which crawled over the soft mud—ripple marks of primeval seas whose murmurs passed into silence countless ages ago —circular and oval hollows produced by showers of rain which no eye witnessed, and which fell on no waving cornfield or flowery meadow—impressions caused by viewless winds indicating the strength of their currents and the direction in which they moved; all these have taught great scientific truths. (2) Is the Book of Revelation—with its strata pregnant of the annals of the human race—different, in this respect, from the Book of Nature? Both are by the same author, and just as the student of the geological strata reasons, as well as infers from his record, so may the student of the Scripture strata reason and infer from his annals. The names here are full of significance. They are the ripple marks telling of tides of human thought and action—impressions caused by the currents of human conception and purpose under the great wonder-working God!

"O strange mosaic! wondrously inlaid
Are all its depths of shade,
With beauteous stones of promise, marbles fair."

Toldoth Beni Noah! Ver. 1-32. (1) Rawlinson says that this genealogy of the sons of Noah is the most authentic record that we possess for the affiliation of nations. Kalisch says that it is an unparalleled list—the combined result of reflection and deep research, and no less valuable as a historical document than as a lasting proof of the brilliant capacity of the Hebrew mind. (2) It is indisputable that the majority of scientific ethnologists regard this record as of the very highest value. Ethnological science has established a triple division of mankind, and speaks of all races as either Semitic, Aryan, or Turanian. And certainly Gen. x. may be regarded as a document furnishing an ethnological arrangement of mankind under three heads. (3) The particular allotment, or portion of each, after their families, &c., is distinctly specified. And although the different nations descended from any one of the sons of Noah have intermingled with each other, and undergone many revolutions—even as the various strata of the earth have been dislocated, and undergone convulsions—yet the three great divisions of the world remain intact and distinct, as separately peopled and possessed of the posterity of each of the sons of Noah, by the holy will and wisdom of Him whose purpose is fixed, and whose counsel shall stand, to make all things new.

"Is blessing built upon such dark foundation!
And can a temple rising from such woe,
Rising upon such mournful crypts below,
Be filled with light and joy and sounding adoration!"

Human Unity! Ver. 1. (1) Humboldt furnishes an interesting suggestion as to the unity of the human race. In a letter to Dr. Ahrendt at Guatemala, he asks whether the idols Buddha in India, Woden in Western Europe, and Votan in Central America—all of which gave name to the Wednesday of the week —are not the same, evidencing most distinctly a unity of origin. (2) Forbes and Pickering have apparently established the fact that, in regard to the animal and vegetable families, these have not been created in particular centres, and that Nature has not reproduced any species in different quarters of the globe. It may, therefore, be reasonably inferred that different human races have not been created in different centres. (3) The unity of the human race, as detailed in Gen. x., may further be inferred from the scientific discovery that there is a marked similarity between the blood corpuscles of all races of men, and that, as Ragg remarks, while blood has been transfused from human veins without failure, a transfusion from different species to man has invariably proved fatal. And

> "Now this truth is felt—believed and felt—
> That men are really of one common stock;
> That no man ever hath been more than man."
> —*Pollok.*

Human Diversity! Ver. 1. (1) It has been argued that when God, who from the beginning determined the bounds of man's habitation, parcelled out the earth among the sons of Noah, it is reasonable to conceive that He gave them an adaptation to the portions He allotted them, or endued them with an unusually plastic power, by which the race of Ham became indigenous in Africa, the race of Shem in Asia, and that of Japhet in Europe's colder clime. (2) One fact in support of this argument may be drawn from the adaptation of all animal and vegetable matter to their respective peculiar spheres and purposes. Geology has discovered to us that each new and successive creation formed a harmonious part of the great whole. Yet how diversified they each and all are—a diversity explicable to students of Nature by law of pre-adaptation. (3) It has been remarked over and over again that there is no exception to this range of adaptation; so that we may fairly include the Shem, Ham, and Japhet diversities. And when we remember that there is no indication in any quarter of separate creations, we realise the grand Scripture assertion of human origin—as of all creation—

> "Shade unperceived, so softening into shade,
> And all so forming one harmonious whole."
> —*Ragg.*

Human Origin! Ver. 1. Shem, Ham, and Japhet were brethren, yet how different the races of the three originals. Is the Scripture record wrong? or has climate produced the remarkable diversity of hue, etc.? Most careful investigation has established the fact that the differences arise from differences in climate. (1) Ragg says that it has been found that, in a very few generations, the fair European of Shemetic or Japetan race became dark within the tropics. Bishop Heber says that the descendants of Europeans in India have totally changed their colour, though they have not lived as exposed to the influences of the sun as uncivilised or barbarian races. Dr. Wiseman shows that the Portuguese who have been naturalised in the African colonies of their nation have become entirely black. (2) This is observable in the Jews. In the plains of the Ganges the Jew puts on the jet black skin and crisped hair of the native Hindoo. In milder climates he wears the natural dusky hue and dark hair of the inhabitant of Syria. Under the cooler sky of Poland and Germany he assumes the light hair and fair, ruddy complexion of the Anglo-Saxon. Smythe says that on the Malabar coast of Hindostan are two colonies of Jews—the elder colony black, and the younger comparatively fair, in exact proportion to the length of their sojourn there.

> "Amazing race! deprived of land and laws,
> A general language, and a public cause;
> With a religion none can now obey,
> With a reproach that none can take away."
> —*Crabbe.*

Heathen History! Vers. 2-30. (1) The history of almost all ancient peoples show, at their commencement, a number of mythological stories, as in Greece, Rome, and Britain, which are of great interest in regard to any inquiries into their origin and early history. There are traces of a large and singularly rich collection of these legends, both in Assyria and in Babylonia. A good example of such documents is the cuneiform account of the descent of the goddess Ishtar into Hades—she who conceived an ardent passion for Nimrod. The whole account is most curious, as showing the religious opinions of that age; and the story has some striking parallels in the poems and legendary stories of other and later countries. (2) Contrast all these heathen histories with the unique Sacred History. Legends and portents there are none. The history of the origin of nations is unrivalled for its stern simplicity—its freedom from all wonderful details. Free and natural as the plan of a river, it begins at the source in Noah, and flows on in quiet, easy course, with an entire absence of all portents and prodigies, such as make heathen history ridiculous even to children.

> "They, and they only, amongst all mankind,
> Received the transcript of the Eternal Mind;
> Were trusted with His own engraven laws,
> And constituted guardians of His cause."
> —*Cowper.*

Bible Annals! Ver. 2-31. (1) An eminent professor says that there are glories in the Bible on which the eye of man has not gazed sufficiently long to admire them. There are notes struck in places which, like some discoveries of science, have sounded before their time, and only after many days been caught up, and found a response on the earth. There are germs of truth which, after thousands of years, have never yet taken root in the world. (2) Jukes remarks on the names here that in them we have the true theory of development, given by One who cannot lie, and given for our learning and instruction in righteousness. It would be full of deepest interest to trace the course of these different families through their successive generations. For in them (he thinks) is prefigured the parentage and birth of every sect and heresy which has sprung up, and troubled the bosom of the regenerate Church; and which

> "As prowls a pack of lean and hungry wolves,
> Driven by fierce winter from Siberian steppes,
> Around a camp's bright flashing fires, have fix'd
> Their ravenous glances on the Bride of Christ."

Life Architecture! Ver. 2-14. (1) Carlyle remarks that, instead of saying that man is the *creature* of circumstance, it would be nearer the mark to say that man is the *architect* of circumstance. It is *character* that builds an existence out of circumstance. Thus it is that in the same family, in the same circumstances, one man rears a stately edifice, while his brother, vacillating and incompetent, lives in a hovel. The block of granite, which was an obstacle in the pathway of the weak, becomes a stepping-stone in the pathway of the strong. (2) The Hamertons were brothers; both were nearly of an age, and both were brought up in the same home. In due time both attended the same seminary, and both entered upon the theatre of life under parallel advantages and disadvantages. The elder was of ordinary mind, liked by the world for his frank, openhanded spirit, but entirely void of energy, fixedness of purpose, and forethought. The younger resolutely set himself to establish a name and a fame, and he succeeded. The difficulties which seemed to the elder colossal and insurmountable became steps of a staircase up which the younger climbed. (3) Nimrod, a man of immense ambition, and endued with a resolute mind firm as iron, soon began to tower above his fellows. In Carlyle's sense, he became the architect of circumstance—building upon the foundation of pride a huge fabric of power, which held in awe his foes, and secured the admiration of his friends. Yet of him and others we may ask—

"Where are the heroes of the ages past?
Where the brave chieftains, where the mighty ones
Who flourished in the infancy of days!
All to the grave gone down."—*White.*

Church and World! Ver. 2-31. From the very first we seem to have two divisions of men. These the Judge is marking off, as the shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats. Before the Deluge, we had the distinct divisions of men in the persons of Cain and Seth—Lamech and Enoch. We may call these the *Church* and the *World*. The Church is that body which is chosen and separated by God (1) to testify to things unseen, to the existence of God—His love—power—judgment; and (2) to teach men that the world which is passeth away. The World is that spirit which loves nothing, and looks for nothing save that which is now. It cares not for God, neither has God in all its thoughts. It recognises only things which are visible, and esteems the invisible as empty shadow and dreamland. Under its deadly prince, it is ever against the Church,

"Weaving its snares, and plying arts to draw
From God's allegiance all the sons of men,
And so to reign without a rival there—
The whole round earth its theme for ever."

Gomer! Ver. 2. Japhet's eldest son seems to have gone to the shores around the Sea of Asof, especially the peninsula. His children were called Cimmerians, and the name of the Crimea is a relic. That place was thought then to be next door to the infernal regions. It was supposed that the people could not see much of the sun because of the clouds and mists of their savage country. Here Gomer's children dwelt until the Scythians drove them west. They took possession of Denmark, and the northern coast of Germany and Belgium, until, in the time of the Romans, they were known as the Cimbri. They crossed over into Britain, but were driven to the north and west, *i.e.*, Wales and Scotland. Here came the truth of Christ to them.

"And then, o'er all the trouble of their day,
A downy veil of tranquil stillness stole,
And with Truth's arm beneath their head they feel
It is God's heart on which they rest so safe."
—*Williams.*

Magog! Ver. 2. (1) The children of Magog were the wild hordes of men who inhabited Northern Asia; beginning at the east of the Caspian sea, and spreading north and north-east into the cold and savage regions of those parts. They were the Scythians, a terrible and fierce people. They were said to be the inventors of the bow and arrow, and they were great at the use of them on horseback. Just prior to the time of Ezekiel, the Scythians—or children of Magog—were driven out by another tribe. Going southward, they spread terror everywhere. (2) Ezekiel took them as a type of the foes of the Church. In his awful predictions of Gog and Magog he foretells with what an overthrow the Lord would destroy them. In the latter days the Church should suffer terribly from their cruel, fierce incursions. Magog thus typifies the great adversaries of the Church at the dawn and dusk of the Millennial eventide. Two woeful invasions is that Church to know; but the authors of each of them are to experience a corresponding woeful overthrow, when nearer and nearer still

"The rush of flaming millions, and the tramp
Like as of fiery chivalry. But, hark!
A voice; it is the shout of God. Behold!
A light; it is the glory of the Lord."
—*Bickersteth.*

Madai! Ver. 2. The father of the Medes—among the bitterest enemies of Assyria. They lived on the other side of the Zagros range, which separated them from the Assyrians. A hardy race of tribes, governed by sheikhs. They were united by Cyaxares the Great into one kingdom. He then conquered Assyria; so that the children of Madai became the third great Eastern empire. The northern part was, and still is, a fine fertile country, with a temperate climate. It grows all kinds of corn, wine, silk, and delicious fruits. Tabreez is a beautiful place—a forest of orchards. Farther south there is a lovely mountainous country, where everything grows—cotton, Indian corn, tobacco, wheat, wine, and every variety of fruit. These sweet glimpses of Nature's beauty and fruitfulness send us (1) back to the time when all the earth was fair, and (2) forward to the time when the earth shall be again an Eden.

> "And Nature haste her earliest wreaths to bring,
> With all the incense of the breathing spring!
> When vines a shadow to our race shall yield,
> When the same hand that sowed shall reap the field,
> When leafless shrubs the flowery palms succeed,
> And odorous myrtle to the noisome weed."
> —*Pope.*

Hamites! Ver. 6-14. The Cushites were in Ethiopia—the children of Mizraim in Egypt—the descendants of Phut also in Egypt and Ethiopia—and the offspring of Canaan in Syria. All these became great nations. They established themselves in great power. They had arts and accomplishments superior to other peoples at that day. Homes of civilisation grew up from a Hamite stock in many a place. They were merchants and builders, and people of great ability in forming and establishing empire. Wherever they were they left traces of themselves. Very massive pieces of architecture, which once must have belonged to a magnificent nation; a peculiar mixture of language; and a native religion in part, at least, of low-creature worship—all these are before us. On our Thames Embankment rises a monument of the race of Ham, in the shape of Cleopatra's Needle; while towering amid nature's desolation in Egypt are the pyramids—those silent records—

> "Those deathless monuments which alone do show
> What, and how great, the Misraite empire was."

Human Helplessness! Ver. 8-14. (1) Kingsley says, that men in the mass are the tools of circumstance. They are thistle-down on the breeze—straw on the river. Their course is shaped for them by the currents and eddies of the stream of life. This was not what man was meant to be; and in proportion as he approaches the Divine ideal does he cease to be the mere tool of circumstance. In proportion as he recovers his humanity—both physically and psychically—in proportion does he rise above circumstance, moulding and fashioning circumstance to suit his purpose. (2) This explains the rise of such men from among the mass as Nimrod, Cæsar, and Napoleon, in the sphere of ambition and conquest. And the same key unlocks many a cabinet in the halls of science and art—learning and commerce. This power Divine grace lays hold upon—refines and sanctifies it, so that the Christian becomes a marked man among his fellows—eminent not for conquest over others so much as over himself, and distinguished by the loftiest of all ambitions to become conformed to the image of God. With such, ambition becomes a virtue; and at last around his brow shall shine

> "In heaven from glory's source the purest beam,
> Whose aspect here, with beauty most divine,
> Reflects the image of the *Good Supreme.*"
> —*Mant.*

Nimrod-Myths! Ver. 9. (1) By the Greek mythologists Orion was supposed to be a celebrated hunter, superior to the rest of mankind in strength and stature, whose mighty deeds entitled him after death to the honours of an apotheosis. The Orientals imagined him to be a huge giant who, Titan-like, had warred against God, and was therefore bound in chains to the firmament of heaven. Some authors have conjectured that this notion is the origin of the history of Nimrod, who, according to Jewish tradition, instigated the descendants of Noah to build the Tower of Babel. (2) In the cuneiform tablets or Chaldean legends, deciphered by Smith, there are some curious details about him. These details are loaded with miraculous and impossible stories, from which it is impossible to separate the historical matter. He is reported to have been a Babylonian chief, celebrated for his prowess. He was also a mighty hunter and ruler of men, who delivered the city of Erech, when the chief of a neighbouring race came down with a force of men and ships against it. He afterwards ruled over it.

> "Here Nimrod, his empire raised supreme,
> And empire out of ruined empire built;
> His greater than the last, and worse by far."

Supremacy! Ver. 9. 1. Nimrod exalts himself to lord it over brethren; for of those over whom he ruled all had sprung—and within a few generations—from one common father. Little is told us of the second form of apostasy; but that little is enough, and indeed, the steps by which lordship over brethren is reached are not many. Jukes asserts that his very name (Rebel) points out the character of those actings, by which the family and patriarchial government instituted by God was changed into a kingdom ruled by violence. There appears to be two steps here: (1) Nimrod becomes a mighty one, then (2) he becomes a mighty hunter of beasts and men. 2. It was so in Israel, when that people desired a king. Saul became a mighty one; then followed the natural sequence in the descent of evil, and he became a mighty hunter. Nimrod again appeared after the resurrection of Christ. Rome began to be mighty—like Nimrod and Saul to grow up tall and towering trunks above its fellow-churches. Then as the trunk spreads forth its branches over smaller surrounding trees. Rome became a mighty hunter. Spiritual dominion became a spirit of domination—hunting souls—imposing a grievous yoke upon them. See Rev. xiii.: where the archadversary is represented as building for his harlot bride a mystical metropolis—

> "The haunt of devils, Babylon the Great,
> Whence in her pride and pomp she might allure
> The nations, as the peerless queen of heaven,
> Mother and mistress of all lands.
> —*Bickersteth.*

Erech! Ver. 10. (1) Warka is a vast mound, now called "Assagah," or the place of pebbles. It was probably a city consecrated to the moon, *i.e.*, a kind of necropolis. Great numbers of tombs and coffins have been found here. The arrow-headed account of the Flood, recently discovered and translated by Smith, was a copy of an original inscription at this place. Thus the existence of this city thousands of years ago is established by the discovery of tiles or slabs in its neighbourhood at this date, recording the fact of the Flood in chap. ix. (2) As of Nineveh, so may we not say of Erech, that it remained quiet in its sepulchre, till an age like the present, when the reality of its evidence to the truth of revelation could be properly attested. He who is nature's Creator and Preserver has kept Erech and other ruins hermetically sealed to give evidence to the truth of His Word in an age when that evidence cannot be lost, and when that Word in its truth is called in question. So great is His power, wisdom, and goodness!

> "Some are filled with fairy pictures,
> Half imagined and half seen;
> Radiant faces, fretted towers,
> Sunset colours, starry flowers,
> Wondrous arabesques between."
> —*Havergal.*

Nimrod Memorials! Ver. 10. Nimrod's name still lives in the mouths of the Arabs. A traveller says, "I shall not soon forget when I first heard his name from one of them. We were going down the Tigris on a raft. Towards evening—one pleasant evening in spring—we came near an immense heap of ruins on the eastern bank of the river. It was all green then, as the Assyrian ruins are after the great rains. The mound and meadows around this ruin were all fresh and green, and full of flowers of every colour. The ruins looked very like a natural hill, but for the pieces of pottery, and brick, and alabaster half hid among the grass. The river was swollen from the rain, and rushed along rather furiously. A sort of dam—a large piece of mason work—stretched across it. Over this, and around, the waters whirled and eddied, and made a tolerably large cataract. We went over safely with a dash. My Arab boatman then went through his religious exclamations, which the danger had called up; after which he told me that the dam had been built by *Nimrod*, and that it was the remains of a causeway which he had to enable him to pass from his city to a palace on the opposite bank."

> "Ah! who that walks where men of ancient days
> Have wrought, with godlike arm, the deeds of praise,
> Feels not the spirit of the place control,
> Or rouse and agitate his labouring soul!"
> *Wordsworth.*

World-Powers! Ver. 10. (1) As the Apostle stands on the sands of Patmos—the waves of the Ægean sea rolling at his feet—he sees emerging from the bosom of the deep a hideous monster—somewhat akin to, yet differing from, the great red dragon. This new fiendish incarnation, Macduff notes, has seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. These heads and horns are the well known symbols of world power—indicating a mighty hunter, a Nimrod. (2) Presently, another beast rises from the earth—a giant deceiver, and exacting homage from them which dwell on the earth. The previous monster of the sea was the representative of brute force; this monster of the land is that of moral despotism. Its weapons are moral and spiritual. Its subject and crouching victims are the depraved intellect—the enslaved conscience—the fettered will of nations and men. Material and moral, physical and psychical antitypes of Nimrod.

> "Couching its fell designs in lamblike guise,
> It sent through earth its legionary spirits,
> And led the shepherds of the silly sheep
> Blindfold, and blinding others, to adore
> The beast, whose deadly wound was healed."

Asshur! Ver. 11, 12, etc. Heeren in his "Handbook" of the History of States remarks that history proper—*i.e.*, the history of States—first dawns upon us in Genesis x. In ver. 11, etc., we are told that Asshur, having previously dwelt in Babylon, went out before the Cushites, and founded the great Assyrian cities. This leads us to infer that the Assyrians, having been originally inhabitants of the low country, emigrated northwards, leaving their previous seats to a people of a different origin. And thus we are drawn to conclude (1) that Babylon was built before Nineveh; (2) that Babylon did not, as Diodorus asserts, owe its origin to the conquest of the country by an Assyrian princess; but that (3) the early Babylonians were an entirely distinct race from the Assyrians; and that (4) a Babylonian kingdom flourished before there was any independent Assyria. It is interesting to notice, as Loftus points out, that the spread of Asshur's race—after leaving Babylonia—is northwards stage by stage, Asshur, Calah, Nineveh. The Book of Nahum is assuredly prophetic of the destruction of Nineveh. According to him, Nineveh was not only to be destroyed by an overflowing flood, but the fire also was to devour it. Heathen history—

ignorant of holy prophecy—declares such was the case. Lately, the buried arts of the Assyrian have been recovered from beneath the dust; as may be learned from Layard's Nineveh. It discloses that God is the Lord of Hosts, and that all the vain glories of the proudest mortals perish at His word.

> "Cities have been, and vanished, fanes have sunk,
> Heaped into shapeless ruin, sands o'erspread
> Fields that were Eden."—*Percival.*

Divine Methods! Ver. 21. (1) In Cana, the governor of the feast addressing the bridegroom admits that it is man's ordinary course to bring forth the best wine, and afterwards that which is of inferior quality. That admission is true, if we are to accept the records of universal history down to our own days. Man invariably puts the best fruit uppermost—brings the best robe forth at the beginning. (2) God acts otherwise. It is His ordinary way to keep the best to the last. Hence in Genesis, chaps. iv. and v., we have first Cain's line, then that of Seth. Again in Genesis, chap. xxv., we have the descendants of Ishmael, and then those of Isaac. Yet again in Genesis, chaps. xxxvi. and xxxvii., we have the detail first of Esau's family, and afterwards that of Jacob's. And so here, the Holy Spirit gives us first the families of Japhet and of Ham, then that of Shem. This is explained in Deut. xxxii. 9, "The Lord's portion is His people."

> 'Holy, Father, we poor lambkins
> Out of bitter woe do bleat;
> Strong men drive us o'er the mountains,
> Sharpest stones do pierce our feet."
> *Sadie.*

Study of Humanity! Ver. 32. (1) It has been noticed that the more extensive our acquaintance becomes with other countries, the more numerous do we find the features which they possess in common with our own. We find the representative forms of life and dead matter which they possess to be in common with each other. In foreign countries what strikes the traveller most at first sight is—not the strange, but—the familiar look of the general landscape. And when the naturalist begins to investigate he finds that the longer and deeper his researches, the more and more numerous and striking are the resemblances of those forms of life to those in his own country. (2) This similarity is not confined to the different regions of our earth alone. Science is showing to us, more and more every day, that the substances of the stars are identical with those of our globe. Pritchard, in reference to spectrum analysis, says that it has not yet discovered in the remotest stellar ray a single new or unknown element. The meteors which fall are of the same constituents as our earth. 'Tis distance only that makes them stars. (3) It is precisely the same with the study of man. The more the different human races are studied the more numerous and striking are the similarities of each and all, one to the other. So far from careful investigation and prolonged study contributing to widen the narrow spaces between the different races, they only reveal more connecting links than were supposed to exist between the offspring of Shem, Ham, and Japhet, and show us

> "How God wrought with the whole—wrought most with what
> To man seemed weakest means, and brought result
> Of good from good and evil both."—*Pollok.*

CHAPTER XI.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**The whole earth.]** The then known world with all its human inhabitants. **One language and of one speech.]** *Heb. Of one lip, and one (kind of) words.* Murphy renders, "Of one lip and one stock of words," and remarks, "In the table of nations the term 'tongue' was used to signify what is here expressed by two terms. This is not undesigned. The two terms are not synonymous or parallel, as they form the parts of one compound predicate. 'One stock of words,' then, we conceive, naturally indicates the matter, the substance, or the material of language. This was one and the same to the whole race. The term 'lip,' which is properly one of the organs of articulation, is, on the other hand, used to denote the form, that is, the manner of speaking, the mode of using and connecting the matter of speech, the system of laws by which the inflections and derivations of a language are conducted. . . . By a combination of terms expressing the two elements which go to constitute every organic reality." Many have held that this original language was Hebrew, but recent researches in comparative philology have shown that all the languages of the world can be traced to one original tongue, which though not identical with the Hebrew has a close affinity with it. **2. As they journeyed.]** *Heb. In their breaking up.* The word is used of the breaking up of an encampment of wandering tribes for the purpose of removing from place to place. "They" refers to "the whole earth" mentioned in the previous verse—the whole race of man. **From the east.]** "Eastward" is proved to be the meaning of the phrase by Gen. xiii. 11, where

Lot is said to journey from Bethel to the plain of the Jordan, which is to the east. The human race, consisting it might be of five hundred families, journeys eastwards with a few points of deflection to the south, along the Euphrates valley, and comes to a plain of surpassing fertility in the land of Shinar (*Murphy*). **A plain in the land of Shinar.**] Probably the same as Babylonia. Herodotus describes the neighbourhood of Babylon as a *great plain*. **3. And they said one to another.**] *Heb. A man said to his neighbour.* **Go to.**] "A mere hortatory interjection, equivalent to our idiom, 'come, let us' do so and so" (*Bush*). The phrase suggests a resolute will and temper—a stern purpose to oppose the will of God. **Let us make brick.**] "The noun and verb here are kindred to each other in form. The noun is plural, meaning *bricks*, and the verb means to make bricks; both of these forms are from the word meaning *to be white*, referring to the whitish clay of which the bricks were made" (*Jacobus*). The plain abounded in clayey soil, but was deficient in stones. **Burn them throughly.**] The common custom was to dry the bricks in the sun, but these are to be burnt so as to make them more durable. Many of these have been found in the ruins of Babylon. "When any considerable degree of thickness was required, the practice in the Babylonian structures seems to have been, to form the mass with sun-dried bricks, and then invest it with a case of burnt bricks" (*Bush*). **Slime.** *Heb. Bitumen.* The LXX. has ἄσφαλτος. This was a kind of mineral cement of a pitchy nature. "Layard observes that the cement in the ruins is so tenacious that it is almost impossible to detach an entire brick from the mass" (*Alford*).—**4. Whose top may reach unto heaven**] *Heb. And his head in the heavens.* Such an expression is hyperbolical in other portions of Scripture, but here it seems that they indulged the hope that the heavens might be thus reached. The heathen fable of giants attempting to scale the heavens is probably a dim tradition founded on this fact.—**Let us make us a name**] Hence their purpose was not to provide against another deluge, but to transmit their fame by such a bold and gigantic undertaking to future generations.—**5. and the Lord came down**] Speaking after the manner of men to denote the Divine interference. The Heb. has Jehovah both in this and the next verse.—**6. Behold the people is one**] "One race with one purpose" (*Murphy*). **They were a unity as a State, embodying one great idea.—They begin to do**] *Heb. This is their beginning to do.* Such was their undertaking.—**7. Confound their language**] "The term here rendered *confound* means to *pour together*, in a way to produce confusion of sounds or dialects" (*Jacobus*)—**That they may not understand one another's speech**] *Heb. One another's lip.* "This is the immediate result of diversifying the formative law of human speech, even though the material elements were to remain much the same as before" (*Murphy*).—**9. Therefore is the name of it called Babel**] "This name is connected with the Hebrew verb meaning to confound, and would mean properly *confusion*. But the native etymology is Bab Il—the gate of Il or El—"the gate of God." This may have been a name given to it by Nimrod (*Smith*), signifying his proud and atheistic designs, but afterwards applied (the same name) to express the confounding result more emphatically" (*Jacobus*).—**10. These are the generations of Shem**] The genealogies are here only given in part, the writer's object being to trace the pedigree of Abram from Shem.—**28. Ur of the Chaldees**] "*Ur* in Heb. means *light*, and was probably so called from the Persian idolatry of *fire worship*, prevalent among this people. Abram was called by God out of this region of idolaters, to be a follower of the true God" (*Jacobus*).—**29. The father of Iscah**] This name is nowhere else mentioned. Jewish traditions consider it as identical with Sarai, one name having been borne before she left Chaldea, the other afterwards. Alford thinks that this view is inconsistent with what is stated in chap. xvii. 17, and remarks that "Marriage with near relatives was the practice of Terah's family" (Chap. xxiv. 3, 4; xxviii. 1, 2).—**30. But Sarai was barren**] Inserted as bearing upon the following history.—**31. And Terah took Abram his son**] "Terah was an idolater (Josh. xxiv. 2), so that this, his journey, can hardly be supposed to have been an obedience on *his* part to that Divine intimation which we learn from the subsequent Jehovist account, was made to his son" (*Alford*).—**They came unto Haran**] The Greek has Charran (Acts vii. 2). Terah intended to go to Canaan, but stopped here, probably on account of increasing age and infirmity.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—9.

THE BUILDERS OF BABEL.

It is a melancholy fact that the evil of our nature tends continually to increase, and assume a sad variety of forms. As men abide under the power of evil they wax worse and worse. We have an instance of this downward tendency in the builders of Babel. Since the flood the course of sin may be thus traced:—(1) *In the form of sensual indulgence.* The type was *drunkenness*, of which Noah has given a sad example. (2) *Disregard of parental authority.* Ham is a typical example of the loss of reverence towards those who are entitled to claim it by the ordinance of Providence. (3) *In the form of ambition.* We have the type in the builders of Babel. Their work was an embodiment of the most daring form of human iniquity, while their frustrated purpose vindicated the supremacy of the Divine rule. The builders of Babel raised a monument of human sin and folly. Let us consider the forms of evil which are illustrated by their work.

I. **The love of glory.** By the building of a city and tower they intended to make for themselves a "name." They would indulge the passion for fame at all costs, and, therefore, engaged in these gigantic labours to secure that end. Such was clearly their motive. It is not likely that they built a city and a high tower to provide against the calamity of another flood, for we can scarcely suppose that they were so foolish as to think that any adequate provision could be made; and even had they thought so, we can hardly imagine that they would have built it upon a *plain.* Nor is it probable that they intended to set up an idol's temple. They undertook this stupendous work for the glory of *their own name,* and not for that of an idol. Babel contained the germ of the worship of humanity rather than the ordinary forms of idolatry. These men wanted to raise a monument to their own glory. This has ever been the cry of ambitious men—*to make a name.* There is a healthy form of ambition when a man allows a noble purpose to be dominated by conscience. To the firmness and determination which comes from an ambition so regulated we owe some of the greatest reforms in social manners, politics, and religion. But with ordinary human nature, ambition takes the worst forms. Men make their own greatness and fame the principal concern of life, till the pursuit of these becomes an absorbing passion by which they are so blinded that they defy the Supreme Ruler of all, and presume to His place What an example have we of human ambition, in that thirst for universal dominion which has infected all nations from the earliest times, and still rages throughout the world! To this may be traced many of the evils that afflict society—chiefly war, with all the awful calamities which it brings. This sin of ambition issues in most powerful evils, as it is, for the most part, the temptation of strong characters. 1. *The boldest schemes of ambition are generally the work of a few.* One man, such as Nimrod, conceives an ambitious scheme and gathers a few like-minded with himself around him. These influence the many, who possess no ability to take the lead, and who are, therefore, ready to obey the command of superiors. The *people* do not originate the great ideas and schemes which rule the world. They adopt those of others. History illustrates the good and evil forms which this fact assumes. The builders of Babel saw their own glory reflected in the many who assisted in carrying out their schemes. 2. *Such ambition involves the slavery of the many.* The multitude rush eagerly to carry out the designs of a few bold and clever minds, but end in becoming their slaves. The ambition of the great often results in the death of liberty.

II. **False ideas of the unity of the race.** God's purpose was that men should spread over the world, and become influential and great by conquering difficulties, and subduing all things to their use. This would seem to have the effect of dividing the human family, and in the end causing a loss of the sense of unity. Hence the builders of Babel thought that they would prevent such a result. They would devise means by which the people should be one—a compact brotherhood. But the Divine idea of the unity of the human race was far different. God's plan was to secure unity by *diversity,* as He does throughout all His works in the natural world. He intended that the true unity of humanity should be *spiritual*—an invisible tie by which men are bound to Himself and to one another by the bonds of faith, obedience, and love. These ambitious men had false ideas as to what constituted the true unity of the race. 1. *They thought that it was* *external.* Hence they built a "city" and a "tower." They provided that they should dwell together, bound by the ties of a common interest. They sought, by means wholly external and artificial, to make themselves one people—a compact body, with a strong defence against all disasters. Men have ever sought to make themselves great by the city and the tower. 2. *They held that the individual must be sacrificed to the outward grandeur of the State.* This is the genius of all Babel-building, to make the city supreme, and to sink the individual. All must be sacrificed to one idea: the nation—State—Constitution. It is not within the province of worldly ambition to recognise the sublime importance of the individual soul. Hence the conflict between the policies of statecraft and the interests of true religion. This exaltation of the State above the individual has (1) *A political form.* The great nations of antiquity strove for universal dominion, and in the pursuit of it trampled upon the dearest interests of men. Ancient Rome sought to make mankind one by the power of the sword. Whatever evils might be inflicted upon humanity, the city and the emperor must be great. The rage for conquest and dominion must end in the glorification of the few and the degradation of the many. (2) *An ecclesiastical form.* In the history of Christianity we can trace the attempt to magnify the Church at the expense of the individual. The Church must be maintained in outward grandeur and influence, though to secure that end souls must be held in the bondage of error and superstition. The Roman pontiffs presumed to govern the Church from an earthly centre, and to subject all Christendom to their dominion. This is in direct contradiction to the teaching of Christ, which asserts that the Church is to be governed invisibly by the Holy Spirit. That Spirit guides believers as a community, bearing the witness of God to the children of the world, but at the same time enters into each man by himself, making the individual soul his temple. Ecclesiastical-Babel builders attempt to destroy the Divine order by their glorification of what is external, and does not belong to the real essence of Christian life.

III. Presuming to place themselves above Providence. In their wild ambition, they designed a tower whose top should "reach to heaven." This was an attempt to cast off the control of Providence and to become a Providence to themselves. It was, in effect, presuming to the place of the Most High. Such is the pride of men. They cast off the rule of God, seek to pierce the very heavens, and to acknowledge nothing above themselves. When God is shut out from the direction of human affairs, then there is no limit placed to man's blasphemous presumption except the arrest of it by Divine judgment. 1. *God interferes in all matters which threaten His government.* It is true that God continually governs mankind; yet there are certain junctures of human history in which His interference is specially manifest. God reigns in nature, which, in its ordinary course, reveals His power as much as any miracles; still, a miracle affords a distinct evidence of the working of a will. So in this instance, when the pride of man presumed so far, God manifestly and distinctly interfered. In language accommodated to our human modes of thought and expression, the Lord said, "Let us go down and then confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech" (verse 7). God is jealous of His honour, and to presume to *that* is to tempt justice. 2. *God often interferes effectually by unexpected means.* He confounded the language of these builders of Babel. They might have had, even in their presumption, a vague suspicion that God would be able to overthrow their work. But they could hardly have imagined that an arrest would have been put upon their labours in so extraordinary a manner as the confusion of their speech. God has many ways by which He can bring men to a sense of His Divine sovereignty. He can reach men in the very depths of their nature by sudden and unexpected means. These foolish builders imagined that they were safe in the unity of their speech, yet it was here that they were vanquished.

IV. A premature attempt to realise that better time coming for humanity. By means of their gigantic work the builders of Babel sought to promote unity, peace, and harmony among their fellow-men. These were objects in themselves good, but they attempted to secure them by improper means. They tried to realise the gifts of a later and better age. Men shall be one, and live in peace; but for this blessed condition of humanity we must be content to wait. The Bible teaches that there is a bright future for the race. When the kingdom of God is fully established amongst men, unity and peace will prevail. That blessed idea was for a moment realised when the Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost (Acts iv. 32). Socialism has endeavoured to bring about this state of things, but the time is unripe. Such systems for the improvement of mankind only lay hold upon *fragments* of the truth. There is a unity possible for humanity, but it is inward, not outward; something out of sight—purely spiritual. Christianity can alone secure this blessing for mankind. As the hand and the foot have no direct connection, but each is connected with one centre of life, so when men have deep and intimate relations with Christ they have the most real union among themselves. The gifts of Christianity are one faith and love, making mankind one. The Christian idea of history is, that God intends, by means of Christ, to build the human race into a *true unity*, and every attempt to gain that glorious end, apart from that idea, is vain. The setting up of the kingdom of God on earth is the grand consummation for which all spiritual men yearn, but that can only be accomplished by spiritual laws. The work of all Babel-builders is doomed to perish.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. The possession of a common language is a great promoter of unity of thought and purpose.

What mankind was in regard to unity of language is what God designs them to be in Gospel times, but in a deeper and more real sense. It is the work of Christ to make men one in faith, hope, and love. Such a unity of conviction, feeling, and aspiration would teach men to speak the same thing (1 Cor. i. 10).

It is worthy of remark that the modern researches into language have recognised the original affinity of most known languages to one common original speech. The sundering and parting of the nations is God's own work. As labour was the penalty for the sin of Paradise, so is separation the punishment for this sin of pride. In both cases, however, was the punishment at the same time a blessing.—(*Calwer.*)

Sin perverts the sweet blessing of one speech to conspiracy against God. (*Hughes.*)

Verse 2. Men easily discover a place whereon to erect the monuments of their ambition. They are permitted to defy heaven, though that liberty be an awful gift.

Wickedness dwells where it finds a fitting place for its purpose.

It is not difficult to suggest a number of reasons to show that the land of Shinar was the centre from whence a thorough and entire distribution of the human race over the face of the whole earth could be most readily and conveniently made; and as the Valley of the Euphrates was the route which, of all others, was the best suited to conduct the founders of post-diluvian society to the place so peculiarly fitted for their subsequent dispersion, we are warranted in supposing that the stranding of the ark occurred at some spot in the vicinity of that valley, from whence the descent was easy, and free from the immense difficulties that must have impeded the passage down the declivities of the lofty Agridagh.—(*Bush.*)

The preference for the hill-country does not appear to have belonged to the young humanity. Under the most obvious points of view, convenience, fertility, and easier capability of cultivation seem to have given to these children of nature a preference for the plain. Zahn gives extracts from Hippocrates and Herodotus in proof of the singular productiveness of this land of the palm, where the grain yields from two hundred to three hundred fold. Thence came luxury, which was followed by the cultivation of the paradisiacal gardens (gardens of Semiramis) and a life of sensuality, together with a sensual religious worship.—(*Lange.*)

Sinners make the gifts of nature to minister to impiety and pride.

Men rebel against God, even where His plentiful goodness is most manifest.

Verse 3. Sinners encourage each other in their rebellion against God.

The arts of life and the free productions of nature may be pressed into the service of iniquity.

Moses would intimate that they were not prompted to the work by the facilities that offered themselves, but that they were disposed to contend with great and arduous obstacles—a circumstance that went to enhance the greatness of the crime, for how could it be that they should thus wear and exhaust themselves in this laborious exercise unless because they had set themselves in a frenzied opposition to God? Difficulty often deters us from necessary works, but they, without stones or mortar, do not scruple to attempt an edifice that should transcend the clouds! Their example teaches us to what lengths ambition will urge men who give way to their unhallowed lustings.—(*Calvin.*)

Verse 4. Their only object was to found a *universal monarchy*, by which all the families of the earth, in all future ages, might be held in subjection. A very little reflection will convince us that such a scheme must of necessity be founded in *ambition;* that it required *union*, and of course a *city*, to carry it into execution; that a tower or citadel was also necessary to repel those who might be disposed to dispute their claims; and that if these measures were once carried into effect, there was nothing in the nature of things to *prevent the accomplishment of their design.*—(*Fuller.*)

It can scarcely be doubted that the ancient heathen fable of the attempt of the giants to climb the heavens owes its origin to some distorted traditions relative to this fact. The memory of the design of the builders of Babel being handed down in its native boldness of expression to nations unacquainted with the Mosaic history and with Eastern language, who were also fond of the marvellous and skilful in fable, would very naturally give rise to the story of the Titan's war with heaven and the discomfiture which followed.—(*Bush.*)

For the distinction and pre-eminence of a "name" men will toil against all difficulties. They scruple not to presume to the habitation of God if they may thus exalt themselves.

The wildest schemes of ambition are consistent with a calm deliberation of purpose. These men could carefully design and plan a city and a tower.

Their declared object was to make to themselves *a name.* This was the proud aim of heathenism—to attain to glory without God, by human wisdom and might. The nations henceforth walk in their own ways (Acts xiv. 16), until, from their vain and scattered attempts, they are re-united in Jerusalem in the Pentecost—a specimen only of what remains to be realised.—(*Jacobus.*)

To make themselves a name, men are ready to dishonour the name of God.

The Babel-builders opposed the design of God in scattering them over the face of the earth, but God has many ways of accomplishing His will.

No name which men can make, without the help and approval of God, can be lasting.

Verse 5. The language which describes the ways of God to man must be accommodated to our infirmity and imperfect knowledge. We are taught thus to study simplicity in describing the Divine operations.

However long God may delay, yet He will surely interfere with the designs of evil men.

All human history shows a *Providence*, but there are marked epochs when God *distinctly* appears. There are events which summon the attention of men to the Power above them.

Sinners sometimes imagine that God is far from the world, but there are times when the conviction is forced upon them that He is near.

The children of men, whether for weal or woe, must in the end be brought face to face with God.

There is something here characteristic of the times after the deluge. The presence of the Lord seems not to have been withdrawn from the earth before that event. He walked in the garden when Adam and Eve were there. He placed the ministers and symbols of His presence before it when they were expelled. He expostulated with Cain before and after his awful crime. He *saw* the wickedness of man, and the land was corrupt *before Him*. . . . . In all this He seems to have been present with man on earth. He lingered in the garden as long as His forbearance could be expected to influence man for good. He at length appointed the limit of one hundred and twenty years. And after watching over Noah during the deluge, He seems to have withdrawn His visible and gracious presence from the earth. Hence the propriety of the phrase, "The Lord came down." He still deals in mercy with a remnant of the human race, and has visited the earth and manifested His presence in a wondrous way. But He has not yet taken up His abode among men, as He did in the garden, and as He intimates that He will sometime do on the renovated earth.—(*Murphy.*)

It was not merely the "city" and the "tower" which God came down to see, but rather the apostacy, rebellion, and pride of which they were the outward manifestations. God proceeds from the work to the doers of it. The Divine judgment comes home to the individual.

1. The *wickedness* of these confederates: they were all sons of Adam, apostate, perishing, in his image. 2. The *weakness* of them. They were but sons of the dust who thus set themselves to build against God. Jehovah descends to take notice of these, who are but as the dust of the balance before Him.—(*Hughes.*)

Verse 6. In like simplicity is depicted the self-willed, God-defying spirit of combination and ambition which had now budded in the imagination of man. *The people is one*, one race with one purpose. *And they have all one lip.* They understand one another's mind. No misunderstanding has arisen from diversity of language. *This is their beginning.* The beginning of sin, like that of strife, is as when one letteth out water. The Lord sees in this commencement the seed of growing evil. All sin is dim and small in its first rise; but it swells by insensible degrees to the most daring and gigantic proportions. *And now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do.* Now that they have made this notable beginning of concentration, ambition, and renown, there is nothing in this way which they will not imagine or attempt.—(*Murphy.*)

God is represented as taking counsel with Himself. He acts not from mere will, but from eternal reasons—"after the counsel of His will." Deliberation suits the majesty of the Supreme Ruler.

Men would carry out many evil designs to a successful issue if they were not restrained by the Providence of God.

The depravity of human nature is under control during the course of the present moral government of God. Were every man permitted freely to carry out all the evil in his heart, society could not exist.

In God's dealings with mankind the facts of human nature are accepted.

The ironical element in the rule of the Divine righteousness appears again in the history of the tower building, after its grandest display in the primitive time. It is just from the false striving after the idol of an outward national unity, that God suffers to go forth the dispersing of the nations. Without doubt, too, is there an ironical force in the words, "and now nothing will be restrained from them."—(*Lange.*)

Proud and presumptuous undertakings are a scorn and derision to God.—(*Hughes.*)

Verse 7. God has many ways—and often unexpected ones—of bringing the counsel of the wicked to nought.

The judgment might have been executed upon the *works* of these daring men, but God chose rather to afflict *themselves* by bringing disorder into their own powers. God has access to the innermost recesses of man's nature.

The Providence of God often takes away from men the gifts which they have abused. Men are punished in those instruments which minister to their iniquity.

Whatever was the precise change wrought in human language, it was with the express object of making the builders unintelligible to each other—so as to break up their unity of action. The Scripture gives us here the only history of the division of mankind into peoples by means of different tongues. And the Scripture also tells us how, under the Gospel, national distinctions were broken down in order to introduce a universal Church (Acts viii. 14).—(*Jacobus.*)

Hence we perceive that the interposition of Providence in confounding the lip of mankind, is the historical solution of the enigma of philology, the existence of diversity of language at the same time with the natural persistency of form, and the historical unity of the human race. The data of philology, indicating that the form is the side of language needing to be touched in order to produce diversity, coincide also with the facts here narrated. The preternatural diversification of the form, moreover, marks the order amid variety which prevailed in this great revolution of mental habitude. It is not necessary to suppose that seventy languages were produced from one at the very crisis of this remarkable change, but only the few generic forms that sufficed to effect the Divine purpose, and by their interaction to give origin to all subsequent varieties of language or dialect. Nor are we to imagine that the variant principles of formation went into practical development all at once, but only that they started a process which, in combination with other operative causes, issued in all the diversities of speech which are now exhibited in the human race.—(*Murphy.*)

The confusion of tongues has done much towards separating the families of mankind. Each nation becomes bound up in its own interests, and strange or hostile towards all others. Difference of language makes men barbarians towards one another.

Herein God opposeth Himself to the sons of Adam. They aim at getting a name, and to prevent dispersion. God is resolved to make them that they shall not understand their own names, nor the speech of their neighbours.—(*Hughes.*)

The spirit of hatred was the cause of the sundering and scattering of the human family; the spirit of love can alone make them one.

The division of languages, though an obstacle to schemes of human ambition, will not be suffered to be an obstacle to the triumph of the cause of God. Of this, God Himself gave a proof and pledge, in the miracle wrought on the day of Pentecost—the counterpart of the miracle at Babel. The separation of nations will not hinder the unity of faith. At this very time, the increasing facility of intercourse, the increasing use of our own tongue over vast continents in the East and West, and the familiar mingling of natives of various lands, are rapidly diminishing the difficulties which differences of language occasion; and whether, literally, these differences are to disappear, or are merely to become innocuous, assuredly in the end, there shall be one "lip," and one Lord, and one heart for all.—(*Candlish.*)

Verse 8. The effect of the Divine interposition is here noted. *And the Lord scattered them abroad.* Not understanding one another's mode of speech, they feel themselves practically separated from one another. Unity of counsel and of action becomes impossible. Misunderstanding naturally follows, and begets mistrust. Diversity of interest grows up, and separation ensues. Those who have a common speech retreat from the centre of union to a sequestered spot, where they may form a separate community among themselves. . . . . The dispersion of mankind at the same time put an end to the ambitious projects of the few. *They left off to build the city.* It is probable that the people began to see through the plausible veil which the leaders had cast over their selfish ends. The city would be abandoned to the immediate party of Nimrod. Its dwellings would probably be too numerous for the remaining inhabitants.—(*Murphy*).

Human plans are confounded that the Divine order may proceed from them. Such is the course of the world's history.—(*Krummacher.*)

Human iniquity may be overruled for good. God is ever, in the course of His providence, bringing good out of evil. He makes the "wrath of man to praise Him," and when the "remainder" of that wrath can but issue in a purpose only evil He "restrains" it, so that it becomes ineffectual.

How liable are the schemes of ungodly men to be interrupted and defeated in the midst of their execution. The builders of Babel had made considerable progress, and were, doubtless, anticipating the satisfaction they should experience in its completion. But they were arrested in mid career. . . . . The eager aspirants for happiness form their plans; they prosecute their designs; they advance in their prospects; partial success animates them to more diligent exertions; but sooner or later God stops them in their progress, and either dashes all their labours to the dust, or says to them, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." Consider, too, the means which God took to effect His purpose. They were the most unlooked-for that could be imagined. And thus does God interpose to disappoint the expectations of worldly men! He has ten thousand ways to render their plans abortive, or to embitter to them the very things in which they have sought their happiness. We have laboured for honour and distinction. He suffers us, perhaps, to attain our wishes, and then makes our elevation a source of nothing but disquietude and pain. Many have looked for enjoyment in the acquisition of a partner, or a family, who after a time would give the world, perhaps, to loose the indissoluble knot, or to have been written childless in the earth. In short, the Governor of the Universe is never at a loss for means to confound the devices of the wise, or frustrate the counsels of the ungodly.—(*Bush.*)

All systems of philosophy—so-called—which through the pride of the human intellect have presumed to subvert God's truth, or impiously to intrude within that shadow of mystery which He has cast around His throne, shall be brought to nought, and the Babel speech of error be confounded.

O, sons of earth! attempt ye still to rise,
By mountains piled on mountains, to the skies!
Heaven still with laughter the vain toil surveys,
And buries madmen in the heaps they raise.
—*Pope.*

Traditions relate that the tower was demolished by the lightning, with terrible tempest. Yet it has been supposed that the immense pyramidal tower built thereabouts by Nebuchadnezzar was erected on the site and ruins of this tower. In the ruins that are now found in that vicinity there is the appearance of a conflagration, the bricks seeming to have been run into solid masses by the action of extreme heat. A Jewish tradition given by

Bochart declares that fire fell from heaven and split the tower through to its foundation. The distance of the modern *Birs Nimrud* from Babylon is the great difficulty in the way of its identification. Yet the Birs temple gives us the best idea of the ancient Babylonian temple tower, and may show us the probable character and shape of the building, at least better than any other ruin.—(*Jacobus.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 10-26.

THE GENERATIONS OF SHEM.

"These are the generations." This is the usual phrase, employed in several places in this book, to mark a new development in the history. Here, it marks the beginning of the fifth document, in which the generations of Shem are recorded. As is often the case with such genealogies, some links are wanting, but a sufficient number are given to indicate the general course of the history. The details of the record are governed by the main purpose of the historian, which was to introduce us to Abraham through the line of Shem. The object of the Bible is not to satisfy a minute and prying curiosity, but to put us in possession of the great facts upon which the doctrines of salvation are based. We learn from this document:—

I. **The line in which the knowledge of the true God was preserved.** Shem was destined to preserve the name of God through all the corruptions of the old world. The knowledge of God might have perished from the earth, had not one people been selected to preserve it. The wisdom of God therefore provided a home for the safe custody of His truth and the maintenance of His worship. This was necessary because the nations had now begun to depart from the living God. Not content with ungodliness, they fell into positive error —into all the absurdities of polytheism and idolatry. The hope of the human race henceforth centres in the chosen people. It is because of the precious interests of this hope that the Bible confines itself mainly to the history of one people, which, though insignificant in themselves, were truly great on account of the *purpose* of their existence. The very phrase, "The King of the Jews," shows that the Messiah King was to arise *out of* that nation. The Bible is not a history of all men, but a history of the kingdom of God, and therefore the heathen nations gradually drop from the sacred page, and only appear at distant intervals when they come in conflict with the chosen people. All things in Scripture are subordinated to its main purpose. We learn also—

II. **The direction of the stream of history towards the Messiah.** If we can say that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. xix. 10), we may also affirm that the spirit of sacred history centres in the same testimony. In the records of the chosen people, we can discover a movement towards a sublime end. The promise of a Messiah was at first vaguely given, but in process of time it grew clearer in outline, and richer with concentrated blessing. It increased in definiteness until "God was manifest in the flesh." "God calmly and resolutely proceeds with His purpose of mercy. In the accomplishment of this eternal purpose He moves with all the solemn grandeur of long suffering patience. One day is with Him as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Out of Adam's three sons He selects one to be the progenitor of the seed of the woman. Out of Noah's three sons He again selects one. And now out of Terah's three is one to be selected. Among the children of this one He will choose a second one, and among his a third one before He reaches the holy family. Doubtless this gradual mode of proceeding is in keeping with the hereditary training of the holy nation, and the due adjustment of the Divine measures, for at length bringing the fulness of the Gentiles in the covenant of everlasting peace."—(*Murphy.*) We learn further—

III. The gradual narrowing of human life. As a judgment upon the sin of the old world, God determined to contract the duration of human life. That judgment was not inflicted at once. The threatened limit was but slowly reached. God is not in haste to inflict penalty. His justice proceeds with a solemn majesty of movement. In this history, which shows how the span of life is gradually narrowing, it would appear as if the old energy does but slowly leave the children of men. "In the manifold weakenings of the highest life endurance, in the genealogy of them, there are, nevertheless, distinctly observable a number of abrupt breaks—(1) from Shem to Arphaxad, or from 600 years to 438; (2) from Eber to Peleg, or from 464 years to 239; (3) from Serug to Nahor, or from 230 years to 148; beyond which last, again, there extend the lives of Terah, with his 205, and of Abraham, with his 175 years Farther on we have Isaac with 180 years, Jacob 147, and Joseph 110. So gradually does the human term of life approach the limit set by the Psalmist (Ps. xc. 10). Moses reached the age of 120 years. The deadly efficacy goes on still in the bodily sphere, although the counter-working of salvation has commenced in the spiritual."—(*Lange.*)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 10, 11. The general title is expressed thus, "These are the generations of Shem." Of these Moses was speaking, chap. x., so far as Peleg, whose name being given him upon the occasion of dividing the earth; by way of parenthesis, he includes the history and cause of this earth's division, in the former part of this chapter. He now returns to draw up the line full unto Abram, about which this title is set in the front. Consider the use of all these mentioned in the title. 1. To point out where the Church of God was after the flood. 2. To show God's Providence in singling out some generations in the world for His Church, these and not others. 3. To make known to us the state of the Church either for truth or for corruption at this time. 4. To continue to us the right chronology of the world, not for speculation only, but for pious practice to us, upon whom the ends of the world are come. 5. To make us better understand some passages of the prophets mentioning these persons or their conditions. 6. To show us the true line of Christ, and to confirm the New Testament given by Him. Every generation in the Church from the flood is but to bring Christ nearer.—(*Hughes.*)

A second Kenan is inserted after Arpakshad in the Septuagint, and in the Gospel according to Luke. But this name does not occur even in the Septuagint in 1 Chron. i. 24, where the genealogy of Abraham is given. It is not found in the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Targums, or the ancient versions. It does not appear in Josephus or Philo. Neither is it found in the Codex Bezae in the Gospel of Luke. It must therefore be regarded as an interpolation.—(*Murphy.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses 27–32.*

THE DAWN OF ABRAM'S HISTORY.

Here we have the commencement of the sixth document, indicated by the usual preface, "These are the generations." This portion is intended to bring Abram before us, and therefore goes to the roots of his history, showing us from what a source so eminent an example of righteousness sprung. The history is brief, but it may be considered as a condensed outline of Abraham's life. Here we find him—

I. **Possessed of great moral courage.** Terah, the father of Abram, was an idolater (Josh. xxiv. 2). Both himself and his children were ignorant of the true object of worship, or if they had any knowledge of this, they did not retain that knowledge, but suffered themselves to be led away by the impiety around them. Such is the hole of the pit from whence this sublime character was digged. Abram is the next great name in the sacred record to Noah, and their moral histories are very similar. Noah passed through the flood, and through an age of extraordinary wickedness to the victory of faith; and Abram passed through heathenism to become the chief example, in those early times, of belief in God. Abram had the *moral courage* to leave these idolatrous associations. In verse 31 Terah, his father, is represented as the leader of the migration to Canaan. But it is probable that the history in chap. xii. is anticipated, and that Abram, listening to the Divine call, persuaded his father also to obey. The courage of the father of the faithful influenced all his family, and they were ready to follow the leading of the Providence of God to better things. The great moral revolutions of the world have been brought about by the influence of men to whom God had spoken. By obeying the early suggestions of the Divine Spirit, men have been led on to glorious results, of which at the first they had no suspicion. Here also we find Abram—

II. **Under the shadow of a future trial.** (Verse 30.) Sarai's barrenness was, no doubt, a great trial to him, in that early age when men naturally desired a numerous offspring. But in his subsequent history this circumstance was not only a natural cause of regret, but *it raised a difficulty in the way of his faith.* This fact stood in his way, and for long years he had to endure the conflict of hoping against hope. The shadow of a coming trial now rested upon Abraham in order that his faith might prove itself strong by encountering difficulties.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 27. The present paragraph is of special interest for the coming history. Its opening word *and* (A. V. *now*), intimates its close connection with the preceding document; and, accordingly, we observe that the one is merely introductory to the other. The various characters brought forward are all of moment. Terah is the patriarch and leader of the migration for part of the way. Abram is the subject of the following narrative. Nahor is the grandfather of Rebekah. Haran is the father of Lot, the companion of Abram, of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, and grandmother of Rebekah, and of Iskah. Iskah alone seems to have no connection with the subsequent narrative.—(*Murphy.*)

Small hath the line of the Church been from the beginning, in comparison with the line of the world.—(*Hughes.*)

If we seek for the origin of some of the greatest religious and social revolutions which the world has known, we often find it in a small group of men.

Verse 28. Properly, *in his presence,* so that he must have seen it; it does not, therefore, mean simply *in his lifetime.* The first case of a natural death of a son before the death of his father, is a new sign of increasing mortality.—(*Lange.*)

Death is described as the land "without any order," and truly without any order does he snatch away the sons of men. He strikes down the children before the face of their parents.

Providence ordaineth the land of the nativity of some to be the place of their expiring.—(*Hughes.*)

Verse 29. Sarai was, according to

chap. xx. 12, the daughter of Terah by another wife than Abram's mother, and was ten years younger than her husband (chap. xvii. 17).—(*Alford.*)

Verse 30. 1. The subject spoken of, *Sarai;* she that was to be the mother of the Church, of whom, purposely, the Spirit writeth this which followeth to show forth the power of God. 2. The condition spoken of her—under two expressions. (1) *She was barren, i.e.,* naturally she was so, and that from her youth and first marriage—the fitter object for God to work upon by His power. (2) To her *was no child.* That is, hitherto she had no child, when she was now taking her journey with her husband and grandfather. God records the trials of his saints, not for their reproach, but for His own glory.—(*Hughes.*)

Long and silent trials are often the portion of the greatest saints.

Verse 31. It is evident from chap. xii. 1, that this expedition was undertaken in consequence of the Divine call to Abraham to come out from a land of idolaters; but from the deference paid to the head of a family, Terah is here represented as chief in the movement, though really acting in obedience to the monitions of his son. Nahor and his wife Milcah, it would appear, were unwilling to go, at least at present; yet as we find them in the course of the history settled at Haran, and Abraham and Isaac sending to them for wives, we may conclude that they afterwards "repented and went." Thus the whole of Terah's family, though they did not go to Canaan, yet were probably preserved from Chaldean idolatry, and fixing themselves in Haran, maintained for a considerable time the worship of the true God. The narrative suggests to us, that while the most exemplary marks of respect are due from children to parents, yet parents themselves may sometimes be called to follow their children as leaders, when they have obtained clearer light as to the path of duty, and go forth at the evident call of God. But even in such cases a proper spirit of filial reverence will give as much precedency as possible to parental actions.—(*Bush.*)

A godly man in the performance of the highest duties will consider the claims of natural propriety. St. Paul does not scruple to refer the Corinthians to the teaching of nature, and to urge them to have regard to what is seemly.

Religious duty can be performed so as not to interfere with the claims of natural relationship.

Terah's migration to Canaan—(1) Its spirited beginning; (2) its failure to go on. Abraham and his kinsmen—(1) He was probably the author of the movement; (2) they, probably, the cause of his tarrying in Haran.—(*Lange.*)

St. Paul tells us that Abraham went forth "not knowing whither he went." Here it is stated that the "land of Canaan" was the object and purpose of this migration. So it was in the Divine destination, but not as a definite resolve of their own. The historian evidently writes from the standpoint of subsequent facts. They went forth under the leading of Providence, having just light enough for each successive portion of the journey—the end not yet revealed. Faith asks not to see the whole of its course spread before it, but only light enough to take the next step. He who gives that faith will take care of the whole course, and secure the success of the end.

They came to Haran, and dwelt there. Broken down with fatigue, he halts for a season at Haran to recruit his wasted powers. Filial piety, no doubt, kept Abram watching over the last days of his venerable parent, who, probably, still clung to the fond hope of reaching the land of his adoption. Hence, they all abode in Haran for the remainder of the five years from the date of Abram's call to leave his native land.—(*Murphy.*)

Verse 32. Time and place are appointed to die as to be born in. It is good to be ready in every place.—(*Hughes.*)

Terah was two hundred and five years old. If Abram, therefore, was seventy-five years old when he migrated from Mesopotamia, and Terah was seventy-five years old at his birth, then must Abraham have set forth sixty years before the death of Terah. And this is very important. The migration had a religious motive which would not allow him to wait till the death of his father. As Delitzsch remarks, the manner of representation in Genesis disposes of the history of the less important personages before relating the main history. The Samaritan text has set the age of Terah at one hundred and forty-five, under the idea that Abraham did not set out on his migration until after the death of Haran. The representation of Stephen (Acts vii. 4) connects itself with the general course of the narration.—(*Lange.*)

Terah, like Moses, failed to enter the Land of Promise. God had provided for him a better country, where the purposes so incompletely fulfilled here will reach completion. There are no broken and rudimentary structures in the city of God.

We are forcibly reminded of our pilgrim state by the fact that many of God's people have died on journeys. However imperfectly we may have realised our ideal of life, it is well to be prepared for that last solemn journey which we must take alone, and where no help can avail but the rod and staff of God.

The history here given of the post-diluvians has a striking resemblance in structure to that of the ante-diluvians. The preservation of Noah from the waters of the flood is the counterpart of the creation of Adam, after the land had risen out of the roaring deep. The intoxication of Noah by the fruit of a tree corresponds with the fall of Adam by eating the fruit of a forbidden tree. The worldly policy of Nimrod and his builders is parallel with the city-building and many inventions of the Cainites. The pedigree of Abram, the tenth from Shem, stands over against the pedigree of Noah, the tenth from Adam. And the paragraph now before us bears some resemblance to that which precedes the personal history of Noah. All this tends to strengthen the impression made by some other phenomena already noticed, that the book of Genesis is the work of one author, and not a mere pile of documents by different writers.—(*Murphy.*)

ILLUSTRATIONS ON CHAPTER XI.

BY THE

REV. WM. ADAMSON.

Motive in History! Ver. 1-9. (1) It has been suggested by Hopkins that the primal disobedience of Adam and Eve is stated not to show forth its strangeness, but to disclose—in the several scenes which were its immediate consequents—the wondrous affectionateness of Him who had been disobeyed. And *this* is done with the pen of a master. And so with the homicide of Cain, and the vices of the antediluvians; they are used as a foil to bring out a vivid illustration of the Divine gentleness. It is true that these all reveal to us that God is a consuming fire towards sin, and wilful, obstinate sinners; but even these revelations are like the dark background which the artist places to set out more conspicuously his "designs of fair colours." (2) Why may we not suppose that the same paramount purpose stands out in bold relief all along the Mosaic book, and thus includes the Babel narrative? The Divine goodness appears like a rainbo spanning the dark cloud of human pride an ambition. There is the "Tongue Tower ruin, but it lies in Gen. ix. as the plant has out of whose root springs a more vigorou stem and beautiful flower than before the win and storm broke its first shoot. It reminds u of the savannah of the west which the fire ha scorched—upon whose brown bare bosom th showers of rain fall, to make the wildernes and solitary place glad, and the blistered deser to bloom as the rose. Divine gentleness revealed! Such is the primary (we do not sa the only) motive in Gen. ix.

"Then let us sing, our shrouded way thu
wending,
Life's hidden snares among,
Of mercy and of judgment sweetly blending,
Earth's sad but lovely song."—*Macmillan.*

Word-Witnesses! Ver. 1-9. The long-lost records of Babylonia and Assyria promise, when fully examined, to throw a flood of light not only upon Divine Revelation, but upon the history, religious and social status of great primeval nations, whose names, and some of whose acts, are mentioned in Scripture. Very much, says Professor Porter, has yet to be done by the traveller and the excavator before the sources of information contained on sculptured slabs and inscribed tablets have been reached. When that is done, a still more difficult task will remain in the classification of the materials and the deciphering of the records. But we look forward hopefully, and may confidently anticipate the most complete success. Testimony clear and indisputable will then be furnished to the matchless truthfulness of the Word of God by the ruins of

"Bel's cloud-capt tower, her gorgeous palaces,
Her solemn temples, her Tongue-Tow'r itself."

Genesis and Chaldean Legends! Ver. 1-9. (1) Before the Chaldean discoveries by Smith, those who wished to believe the Genesis narrative a myth roundly asserted that it was a chimera of some crazed mind, or the creation of some corrupt one. No sooner, however, was the discovery made, and the correctness of the cuneiform inscription cipher attested, than the same enemies, whose wish was father to the thought, asserted that the Chaldean accounts were legendary, and that the Genesis narrative was also legendary because derived from these same Chaldean historical myths. (2) The simple brevity of the history in Genesis is familiar; whereas, Gardiner points out that the Chaldean inscriptions are obscure, verbose, and swelling out at every point with the monstrosities of early mythology. It is as if a modern scholar should sit down to pick out the grains of truth in the prehistoric myths of ancient Greece, and having set them down soberly, should then be told that his work must itself be legendary because derived from legendary sources. (3) Even though Abraham did analyse these Chaldean legends with matchless skill and penetration, and drew from them for our use the simple history out of which they had gradually grown, this would not affect the truthfulness of his work. And if we add that Abraham (or Moses) was divinely inspired to recover the original truth from this mass of legend, the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Genesis narrative is placed beyond dispute.

"Whence, but from heaven, could men unskilled in arts,
In several ages born, in several parts,
Weave such agreeing truths."—*Dryden.*

Babel Bricks! Vers. 2-4. These emigrants to Shinar were evidently dissatisfied with a patriarchal life, and desirous of founding a great monarchy. I. *Ambition*, or the Perversion of the divinely-implanted principle, "Excelsior." It (1) *cautions* us to beware of our own hearts, and (2) *counsels* us to be careful of the Divine Will. II. *Assumption*, or the Pre-supposition of man's independence of God. It (1) *cautions* us to remember our entire dependence, and (2) *counsels* us to regard the Divine pre-eminence as essential to our happiness. III. *Association*, or the Persuasion that human unity means human perpetuity. It (1) *cautions* us against forgetting that God must come into any scheme after unity, and (2) *counsels* us about fulfilling the Divine Ideal of unity in Him. *Lessons:* (1) Moral *Towers of Babel* (great or small) should be erected in God's name, and carried through in God's strength; (2) Moral *Towers of Babel* (great or small), if not so attempted and accomplished, tend to dishonour God's name, and to disown God's strength; (3) Moral *Towers of Babel* (great or small) thus dishonouring Him, are sure, sooner or later, to be overthrown by God, who has all forces at His command; and (4) Moral *Towers of Babel* (great or small) conceived in God's name, constructed by God's strength, and contributing to God's glory, are certain of the Divine permission and permanence. Thus,

"Scripture, in this life-history, unfoldeth
Some lessons sweet to me;
God's goodness in reproof my eye beholdeth,
And His severity."

Shinar Site! Ver. 2. (1) Noah's sons would come down from the high lands of Armenia and settle in the warmer plains below. Journeying from the valley of Araxes, they would travel along the eastern side of the Koordish mountains, without finding a good place to cross them until they were almost as low down as Babylon. That is the course which the caravans take from Tabrees at this day. Coming to Kermansheh, they would turn short about, and pass through the mountains towards Bagdad. Thus between the Tigris and Euphrates we have the land of Shinar, where Nimrod built Babel or Babylon. (2) "Descending," as Wylie observes, "from the lofty mountains which form the northern rampart of Asia Minor, the Tigris and Euphrates hold on their course to the south till they arrive on the rich and level plains around the ancient city of Bagdad. Here they unite their streams, and flow through a valley which bears marks of having, in ancient times, been perhaps the richest and loveliest region on the earth, and which is still surprisingly fertile, though quite neglected. There may have been design on the part of Nimrod in seeking to establish his empire's metropolis in the region where Paradise was supposed to have stood. Design or no design, Nimrod's

"Cities have been, and vanished; fanes have sunk,
Heaped into shapeless ruin; sands o'erspread
Fields that were Edens; millions, too, have shrunk
To a few starving hundreds, or have fled
From off the page of being."—*Percival.*

Brick-Bitumen! Ver. 3. (1) There are ruins of huge temple-towers at Erech or Warka. The Warka temple is built of sun-dried bricks laid in mud mortar, with layers of reed put in from time to time to hold the mass together. The bricks are small and inferior; but they have the name and titles of the king stamped on them. (2) The wood being chiefly palm, and there being probably some superstitions in regard to using them for building purposes, the builders had to find some other materials upon which to work. Stone there was none, and they did not seem to know how to make lime-mortar. But they had excellent clay for brick-making, and knew the art of the brick-kiln. (4) Bitumen is a black, slimy, viscous substance found in springs, coming up out of the earth. In this the bricks were laid. At the present day it exists in abundance. The Arabs collect it, and sell it at Mosul for building purposes, and for lining boats. Old boats plastered with bitumen, such as those of the present, have been found buried under the soil in Babylonia. Thus Nature, while ministering to man's necessity, makes him the pen by which to write for future generations, upon the mysterious mud, the solemn lesson that

> "All things have their end;
> Nations and cities, which have diseases like to men,
> Must have like death that we have."
> —*Webster.*

Slime-Symbolism! Ver. 3. (1) Jukes says that this slime was the sulphureous compound formed from the corruption of animal and vegetable substances. Well does it represent that dangerous element—so ready to burst out into a blaze—that cement of self-love and lust of power, by which mystic Babylon is now held together. (2) It is remarkable that this slime is easily melted again, though intensively adhesive and tenacious, rendering it difficult to loosen the bricks. How powerful and tenacious is the system of Papal Babylon, defying all human efforts to disintegrate it. Nevertheless, the fire of Divine judgment, kindled by the breath of Infinite holiness, will one day dissolve the slime, so that the whole fabric will crumble. (3) As surely as the awful foreshadowings of Jehovah upon the material Babel have been realised to the very letter, as hundreds of modern travellers have perceived, so certainly those terrible forewarnings of coming overthrow of the mystical Babel shall be fulfilled; for

> "Babel, as smitten with the curse of God,
> Shall fall in ruinous heap, and sink—as sinks
> A millstone in the mighty waters—down
> Into a dreadful chasm of fire."

Sin Fecundity! Ver. 4. (1) Pascal says that it is astonishing that the mystery which is farthest from our knowledge—the transmission of original sin—should be that without which we can have no true knowledge of ourselves. It is in this abyss that the clue to our condition takes its turnings and windings, insomuch that man is more incomprehensible without this mystery than this mystery is incomprehensible to man. (2) Apply these two profound sentences to Genesis ix. Without a belief in the Scripture doctrine of "original sin," how can we understand the fall of Noah, and the subsequent national, individual corruption at Babel? Grasping the truth that sin is transmitted from mind to mind, as diseases are to the body, it furnishes a clue to the pride, passion, and presumption of the Babelites in their heaven-defying, God-dishonouring structure. (3) There is certainly evil, says McCosh, in our world; whence came it? We know not. The man of science is often telling us in his realm of scientific disclosures, that the fact is "so-and-so," but he has to add, "How it is so, I cannot tell." The profound theologian, St. Augustine, asks, "Where is evil, or whence comes it, since God the Good has created all things?" A Quaker poet replies:

> "No victory comes of all our strife;
> From all we grasp, the meaning slips;
> The Sphinx sits at the gate of life,
> With the old question on her awful lips."

Birs Nimrud! Ver. 4. This ruin stands six miles south-west of Hillah, *i.e.*, six miles from the Euphrates. Nebuchadnezzar's inscription has been found, in which he says that he built it on the ruins of the Tower of Babel. Smith reads an Assyrian fragment of writing in columns to this effect—that the wickedness of men caused the gods to overthrow the tower; that what they built in the day God overthrew in the night; and that in His anger He scattered them abroad, and confused their counsel. It is remarkable that the Jews have a tradition that fire and earthquake were agencies of its ruin. Certainly it is rent in two nearly the whole way down, and bears traces of fire. Rawlinson says that it consisted of seven stages of brickwork of different colours, as black, orange, red, gold plating, etc. Bochart says that fire from heaven split it through to its foundation. From the fact that the angles face the cardinal points, it is evident that the temple towers were used for astronomical observation, to gaze upon

> "That wondrous blaze; ten thousand trembling fires,
> And dancing lustres, where the unsteady eye,
> Restless and dazzled, wanders unconfined
> O'er all this field of glories."—*Barbauld.*

Tongue Tower! Ver. 6. The building of the Tower of Babel, and the confusion of tongues, was so wonderful an event in itself, and produced such an event upon the human race, that, if it was a fact and not a myth, one would expect its leading incidents to be preserved with great tenacity in primeval traditions. And such is the case. The narrative in Gen. xi. is brief, but graphic. It contains a number of striking particulars, such as building with brick, the use of bitumen for mortar, the site of the tower, the name of the place, and the dispersion of mankind from that central region. (2) But for that brief record, it is doubtful whether man would ever have dreamt of explorations there. Now, the Scripture narrative has not only given the key to where the hidden treasure may be, and to what the hidden treasure may prove, but it has originated and whetted the keen scientific appetite for exploration there. Thus the ruins of the "Tongue Tower" (Barsippa) have been found, with inscriptions recording the sin of the people, their uniting to build the tower, the anger of God, the confusion of their speech, and the scattering of the people. And the awe-struck spectator hears from their broken, voiceless lips that—

> "Even as from man his future doom proceeds,
> So nations rise or fall, according to their
> deeds." —*Southey.*

World-Evil! Ver. 6. (1) According to Scripture, moral and physical evil has intruded into our world. We have traces of it before man was created, in the fall of angelic beings who are ready to tempt Adam and Eve. From the very day when man fell, we have a contest going on in our world. We do not assert, with some of our older divines, that pain and death came upon the lower animals because Adam fell. But it is a noticeable fact, pointed out by McCosh, that death has reigned all along since living beings appeared, even over those who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, on that earth on which man has sinned. Our world is thus of a piece in itself, and its history is consistent throughout. Our whole experience testifies to the truthfulness of the historical record. (2) It does not startle us, therefore, to read the Divine statement from the lips of Jehovah-Jesus in the Eternal Trinity, that, once started on a career of God-defiance, the Babel-builders would go on to deeper depths of viciousness. Their power to increase in evil was greater on account of their being able to converse in one language; therefore, the Divine goodness and gentleness of the Speaker—the Lord Jesus, who ever represents these features in the Eternal Trinity—is manifest in the decision come to, that the one language should be split up into various streams flowing over the world of humanity. It was Infinite wisdom and love turning the evil that is in the world to good account—bringing, so to speak, good out of evil.

> "Round every thorn in the flesh there twineth
> Some wreath of softening bloom."
> —*Macmillan.*

Divine Order in Confusion! Ver. 7. (1) The confusion of tongues was not at random. It was a systematic distribution of languages for the purpose of a systematic distribution of man in emigration. The dispersion was orderly, the differences of tongue corresponding to the differences of race. By these were the Gentiles divided in their lands, everyone after his tongue, after their families in their nations. (2) From the earliest period there has been manifested, in the history of scientific progress, an invincible faith among scientific men that the facts of nature are capable of being arranged in conformity with laws of geometry and algebra. In other words, all have a profound conviction of the existence of what Argyll calls "The reign of law," i.e., order in the midst of apparent confusion and aimlessness. (3) There is no illogical course in arguing that those who believe in God as the Creator of order in nature have a right to conclude that He preserves the same order in history. The cataclysms in nature have an order and object; why not then the catastrophes of history? There is Divine order in the midst of historical confusion, as palpable and manifest as in that of science. Looking back upon the pathway which history has trodden, we can perceive traces of design—powerful evidences of an Infinite aim—order in the midst of confusion. Over the wheels of history, as over the wheels in Ezekiel's sublime vision, is the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.

> "Ye nations, bend, in reverence bend,
> Ye monarchs wait His nod,
> And bid the choral song ascend
> To celebrate your God."—*White.*

Language-Lesson! Ver. 7. (1) It has been reached that certain medicines are administered to produce one disease, or unnatural condition of the system, in order to remove another. The evil, says Macmillan, which has deranged the body, in many instances can only be cured by another evil that will temporarily derange it. A very popular mode of taking the pain out of a burn is to expose the injured part as long as possible to the fire. It is well known that the only safe way of restoring animation to a frost-bitten limb is by rubbing it with snow, or putting it in ice-cold water. It is the bitter medicine of homœopathy and allopathy—speaking generally—which cures the bitter disease. May it not be so in the Divine healing of sin-sick humanity? The confounding of the language at Babel is generally and rightly regarded as a punishment for man's pride. But the error lies in limiting this as the only assignable reason why Jehovah administered the nauseous draught. The "tongue travail" of humanity in all ages has proved a medicine—bitter, if you like, but still a medicine. Here homœopathy and allopathy meet and fraternise. We see them in the hands of the Great and Good Physician administering the bitter draught of confusion, in order that the tongue may recover its original purity.

> "The Last Day only, all God's plan revealing,
> Shall teach us what we owe
> To these blessed remedies, thus concealing
> Themselves in marks of woe."

Shinar Sand! Ver. 8. The very garden of Asia, it has lost much of its glory. More than half the plain is a dry desert; though once it was made fruitful by being watered all over. The people dug canals from the Euphrates to the Tigris, and from these other little branch canals, till the whole country was covered with them, and every part watered abundantly. Then it was all one garden of cultivation; full of people and great cities—rich in grains and fruits—and everywhere grown with palm trees. Now it is all a desert. All over it you can see the remains of old canals and watercourses which once made it fruitful. The lines of embankment sometimes look like ranges of low hills from their size. Where it is not a sandy desert the country is in great part a reedy marsh, where the rivers have broken from their natural beds, and overflowed great tracts of land. The marshes are almost up to the walls of Bagdad—and growing worse from year to year; a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: silent teachers of the great truth that—

"When nations go astray, from age to age
The effects remain—a fatal heritage."
—*Southey.*

Heathen Testimony! Ver. 8. "Until a few years back," Rawlinson remarks, "there was no confirmation of the book of Genesis earlier than the time of Alexander the Great." Now, however, a flood of light is thrown on it by the cuneiform inscriptions. It is highly probable that much more of the earlier part of Genesis will be found in these Chaldean texts. Fragments have been found of the account of the Creation, and building of the Tower of Babel; and there is reason to believe that these are only parts of a series of histories, giving full accounts of these early periods. The fragments, however, relating to the Tower of Babel are unfortunately very scanty. They confirm the statements of Greek writers, according to which the Babylonians related that the gods destroyed the tower by winds.

"Fools, and blind! When, planned by Baalim,
The city of confusion rear'd its brow
Towards heaven, a whisper of God's voice
perplex'd
The builders' language and their works at
once."
—*Bickersteth.*

Babel Bane and Blessing! Ver. 9. We have I. *Bane.*—This lies in (1) Human Pride; (2) Human Passion; and (3) Human Presumption. II. *Blessing.*—This lies in (1) Divine Power; (2) Divine Purpose; and (3) Divine Prevision. The cause of the division of languages lies in an operation wrought upon the human *mind*, by which the original unity, thought, feeling, and will was broken up. The one primitive language, Fausset thinks, is now lost—dispersed amid the various tongues which have severally appropriated its fragments—about to rise again with re-united parts in a new and heavenly form, when Jehovah will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all *call* upon the name of Jehovah to serve Him (see Zeph. iii. 9) with one consent. And the Lord, says Zechariah, shall be King over all the earth. In that day there shall be one Lord, and His name one.

"God reigneth, and the earth is glad! her
large, self-conscious heart,
A glowing tide of life and joy pours through
each quickened part;
The very stones 'Hosannah' cry."—Macmillan.

Divine-Design! Ver. 9. (1) Most persons have seen the beautiful "Venus' Flower Basket." It is now somewhat common in museums and private collections; but few, perhaps, have minutely examined its structure. This structure, so marvellous in the mechanical and æsthetic principles embodied in it, is the skeleton of a sponge—a soft, slimy, almost structureless creature, which we find it difficult to believe in as a veritable animal. Yet it is the law of this creature—developed from a little oval or sac-like germ, destitute of all trace of the subsequent structures—to produce this wonderful framework. No sane mind, Dawson remarks, can for a moment doubt the action of a Creative Intelligence, or declare that all is due to a fortuitous concourse of atoms. (2) As students of nature thus reason and conclude from nature's phenomena recorded in geological strata, so the students of theology have a right to argue and maintain from history's phases detailed in the strata of Scripture, that there is Divine design. And this even in the confusion of Babel. The scattering of the human race from the central home of Eden has produced singular results; a growth of results so intricate and exquisitely unique, that we are practically shut up to the conclusion that history, as nature, is under the moulding hand of God, who doeth all after the counsel of His own will.

"Oh, look with pity down
On erring, guilty man; not in Thy names
Of terror clad; not with those terrors arm'd
That monstrous Babel felt, when fear struck
dumb
The scattered nations of the race of Ham."

Babel! Ver. 9. Traveller after traveller confesses the overpowering sensation of reverential awe which possesses the mind when contemplating the extent and magnitude of the ruins. The grey osiers growing on the river deepen the dreariness of the scene, like flags of distress on a sinking vessel; while the majestic reed-lined stream, wandering solitary amid the maze, seems to murmur something about the time when these ruins were giant palaces and towers, and when this dreary solitude was the abode of gay and thoughtless crowds set on universal empire. The meditative mind—amid such mouldered and mouldering piles—reads more plainly than ever a sentiment which is true alike of individuals, cities, and empires. "Be sure your sin will find you out." Like the builders of Babel, we are prone to quaff the cup of pride; therefore their fate cautions us of the danger of such a course.

> "We fain would eat the fruit that is forbidden,
> Not heeding what God saith!
> But by these flaming cherubim we're chidden
> Lest we should pluck our death."

Babel and Pentecost! Ver. 9. (1) That day when the cloven tongues came down, and the first missionaries of Jesus spoke suddenly in many languages, was the beginning of a work which will never stop until the Gospel has made all men one again—one in heart and hope—one in the name of the Lord Jesus. "We do not mean," says Green, "that the Gospel teaches all men the same language; though it is true that there are some words which the Gospel carries to every land and people and tongue." (2). A Hindu and a New Zealander met upon the deck of a missionary ship. They had both been converted from their heathenism, and were brothers in Christ. But they could not speak to each other. They pointed to their Bibles, shook hands, and smiled in one another's faces; that was all they could do apparently. At last a happy thought occurred to the Hindu. With sudden joy, he exclaimed, "Hallelujah!" The New Zealander, in delight, cried out, "Amen!" (3) Those two words, not found in their own old heathen tongues, but given to them by the Gospel, were to them the beginning again of "one language and one speech." In the Patmos vision of the harpers by the glassy sea, we have the song of the mighty multitude of the redeemed from every kindred and people, and nation and tongue, in one united Church. It is a harmony of exultant praise over the realisation of the longed-for unity of God's people. "The holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge Thee; Allelujah!" (Rev. xv.)

> "Melodious language, wherein every thought
> Finds utterance, o'erspreading the circling globe,
> A language worthy of the sons of God."
> —*Bickersteth.*

CHAPTER XII.

Critical Notes.—Now the Lord had said] More literally this may read, "*The Lord said,*" and may refer to a call to leave Haran, and not to that which Abram received in Ur, of which Stephen speaks in Acts vii. 2, and which was a short time previous (*Jacobus*).—**Abram**] *Heb. High father*—a distinguished progenitor of a race.—**Get thee out**] Heb. *Go for thyself.* The command was pre-eminently to him and for his advantage; though others were not excluded, as the history shows.—**Of thy country**] The fatherland, the land of Mesopotamia, as it embraced both Ur of the Chaldees and Haran (*Lange*).—**And from thy kindred**] Alford renders "*the place of thy birth,*" such being the general meaning of this word. Still, in other places, it plainly signifies *kindred* (Gen. xliii. 7; Esther viii. 6), and this is the probable meaning here. Abram's kindred would be the Chaldaic descendants of Shem.—**From thy father's house**] Terah and his family (Gen. xi. 31, 32).—**2. And thou shalt be a blessing**] *Heb. Be thou a blessing.* He is to be not merely a subject of blessing, but a medium of blessing to others. It is more blessed to give than to receive. And the Lord here confers on Abram the delightful prerogative of dispensing good to others (*Murphy*).—**3. And curse him that curseth thee**] *Heb. Those that make light of thee will I curse.* The verb signifies to treat as vile, worthless, or contemptible. This is included in cursing, which is the imprecation of evil.—**In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed**]. These words have given occasion for much contention on the part of rationalist interpreters. Knobel, who is the best example of them, would understand them, that all the families of the earth should *bless with* (or, *in*) *thee, i.e.*, wish themselves blessed in—by the example of—Abraham; wish for themselves blessedness like his. This rendering he defends by chapter xlviii. 20, "*In thee shall Israel bless,* saying, God make thee as Ephraim and Manasseh." The objection to this is that the verb is in the passive voice, not *bless,* but *be blessed.* On such a matter we may further remark that we may well leave the New Testament writers, to whom Hebrew was familiar, to decide for us which of the senses should prevail. And this has been plainly and emphatically done. See Acts iii. 25; Gal. iii. 8, 14. Notice that literally the expression is, "all the families of the *ground,*" so that the blessing is an echo of the primal curse (*Alford*).—**4. And Lot went with him**] Kurtz understands that "God had not intended that Lot should join Abram on his journey. This (he says) is sufficiently manifest from his later history. But God allowed it, probably, from condescension to Abraham's attachment to his family." It would be more strictly proper to say that, as the narrative presents it, Lot joined the company of his own prompting, and not by Divine command, as in the case of Abram. It was, therefore, upon his own responsibility (*Jacobus*).—**Seventy and five years old**] Abram's age at the second stage of his journey is now mentioned. Hence we can determine that he departed from Ur five years before.—**5. All their substance that they had gathered**] *Heb. All their gain which they had gained.* A term descriptive of property, whether in money, cattle, or any other kind of possessions.—**And the souls they had gotten in Haran]** *Heb. And the souls which they did* (*or made*). *Nephesh*, here used, denotes collectively the *persons* (servants) taken with them from Haran—as in Ezek. xxvii. 13. The *Sept.* renders it *πασαν ψυχην*, *every soul*. The verb *to do*, or *make*, here used, is rendered by the Sept. *εκτησαντο*, *acquired*—as Deut. viii. 17; Gen. i. 12. The *Chald.* renders, "All the souls he had subdued unto the law." Some understand it, therefore, of proselytes made to the true religion from among the heathen at Haran. But the general sense which best suits the context is that of *bond-servants*, which Abram had acquired. These were gotten commonly by conquest, or by money. Here it seems to be the latter (*Jacobus*).—**Gotten]** Strictly, *made*, descriptive of the gain in slaves, male and female (*Lange*). Not only gotten, as secular property, but had made obedient to the law of the true God (*Wordsworth*).—**6. The place of Sichem]** Some understand the expression as meaning the neighbourhood of Sichem; others, of the site where it afterwards stood—speaking by way of anticipation. Most expositors regard the words, "the place of," as redundant—*the place Sichem*. It may more likely mean "town or village of Shechem." At the time of Jacob's arrival here, after sojourning in Mesopotamia, Shechem was a Hivite city, of which Hamor, Shechem's father, was chief man. And it was at this time that Jacob purchased from him "the parcel of ground" (of the field) which he gave to his son Joseph, where was Jacob's well (John iv. 5). The name means "*shoulder*," or "*ridge*" (*Jacobus*.) *Shechem* was one of the oldest towns in Palestine.—**Plain of Moreh]** The rugged and mountainous nature of the country seems to forbid the idea of any "plain" existing there. The best authorities render the *Heb. alion Moreh*, "the oak of Moreh." The name may have been derived from its owner or planter. Oaks, from their great size and durability, would be convenient as landmarks in those early ages. They were also a meeting-place for the performance of religious rites.—**And the Canaanite was then in the land]** This notice was most probably added to show that the land was not empty at that time, but that the subsequent promise implied a displacement of inhabitants then in possession. Nothing can be more natural than such a notice; and there is not the slightest reason for supposing it to be an interpolation of later date than the narrative itself (*Alford*). These words note the great obstacle Abram had to contend with. "The author of Genesis evinces in this clause his knowledge of the Canaanites, pre-supposes their nature and character to be known in such a way as a late writer could not do" (*Jacobus*).—**7. And the Lord appeared unto Abram]** This remarkable phrase first occurs here. We know not in what manner God appeared to Abram, but in some way he felt that God spoke to him. "The possibility of God appearing to man is antecedently undeniable. The fact of His having done so proves the possibility. On the mode of His doing this it is vain for us to speculate" (*Murphy*).—**Unto thy seed]** Not unto thee. To Abram himself "He gave none inheritance in it; no, not so much as to set his foot on" (Acts vii. 5) (*Murphy*).—**Will I give this land]** God at first signified His purpose of merely *showing* to Abram a distant land in which he was to sojourn; he now speaks of *giving* it, but not immediately to himself, but to his seed; doubtless for a further trial of his faith (*Bush*).—**And there builded he an altar unto the Lord]** In Shechem, as Jacob did afterwards (Gen. xxiii. 20). Thus, by means of a religious act, he assumed the proprietorship of the land. The sanctuary stood here in the time of Joshua (Josh. xxiv. 1, 25, 26), and the law was proclaimed with blessings from Gerizim, and curses from Ebal (Deut. xxvii. 12; Josh. viii. 33-35). Here, also, Joshua gave his parting counsels to the people (Josh. xxiv. 1, 25).—**8. And he removed from thence unto a mountain]** *Heb. mountainwards*—indicating the nature of the district, and not any particular mountain. A similar expression in Gen. xix. 30.—**Bethel]** This name signifies "house of God." At this time the place was called Luz, and did not become Bethel until so named by Jacob after his vision (Gen. xxviii. 19). "It does not appear that any town was ever built on the precise spot to which Jacob gave this name; but the appellation was afterwards transferred to the adjacent city of Luz, which thus became the historical Bethel. Modern researches have not been able clearly to identify the site of this ancient city; but there is a ruined village and monastery about eighteen miles south of Nablous or Shechem, and north of Jerusalem, which is generally supposed to indicate very nearly the spot" (*Bush*)—**On the west]** *Heb. "from the sea,"* or *seaward*. The expression rests upon the fact that the Mediterranean Sea was the western boundary of Canaan. In the same way, "the desert" is used for "the south" (Psa. lxxv. 6, where "from the south" is the rendering of the Heb. "from the desert."—**Hai]** *Heb. The Ai*. The word means, a heap of ruins. The H represents the Heb. definite article. It was a royal city of Canaan, and was the first taken by the Israelites after the passage of the Jordan (Josh. vii. 3, 4, 5). The exact site is not known.—**Called upon the name of the Lord]** As "Jehovah."—**9. And Abram journeyed, going on still towards the South]** *Heb.* "He broke up his encampment, going and pulling up southwards." Thus he advanced from place to place by degrees, according to the customs of nomadic life; but his general direction was southwards. The fact is noticed in Heb. xi. 10.—**10. A famine in the land]** The frequent famines are a peculiar characteristic of early times, and of uncivilised lands. Egypt as a rich and fruitful land was even then a refuge from famine, as it was in the history of Jacob (*Lange*). Egypt being annually watered by the overflow of the Nile, and not depending on rains for the crops, was the great grain-growing region, and corn could be found there when famine prevailed in the adjoining country (*Jacobus*).—**11. He said unto Sarai]** Thus to maintain the pretence that she was his sister was a settled matter between them.—**A fair woman**] Heb. "**Fair** of aspect" (*Sept.*). "Of fair countenance." "The original implies fairness of complexion, and one therefore likely to attract the attention of the darker coloured Egyptians" (*Bush*). —**13. Say, I pray thee**] Heb. "Say now"—a word not indicating time, but request and entreaty. This word is used with a similar meaning in English.—**My soul shall live because of thee**] *Heb. napshi*—a word often used for the *person*, or individual life. Here, the meaning evidently is, "My life shall be spared because of thee." **15. Pharaoh**] Not a personal name, but a title common to all the kings of Egypt, like that of Cæsar among the Romans. **And commended her before Pharaoh.**] "Modern travellers speak in a similar way of Oriental kings, who incorporate into their harems the beautiful women of their land in a perfectly arbitrary way" (*Knobel*). "The recognition of Sarah's beauty is more easily explained, if we take into view that the Egyptian women, although not so dark a complexion as the Nubians or Ethiopians, were yet of a darker shade than the Asiatics. The women of high rank were usually represented upon the monuments in lighter shades for the purpose of flattery" (*Hengstenberg*). —**16. Entreated Abram well for her sake**] Heb., "Did good to Abram for her sake"—bestowed upon him many favours and gifts. **Sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels**] For "she asses" the Septuagint has mules. "The presents are much the same as the items of the patriarchal wealth given elsewhere (*e.g.*, Gen. xxiv. 25, xxxiii. 15; Job i. 3, xlii. 12). It is to be observed that in these enumerations we nowhere find horses mentioned, though they were the pride of Egypt" (*Alford*).—**17. Plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues**] Heb., "Beat him with great strokes or blows." We know not what was the nature of these chastisements, but they were evidently of such a nature as to guard Sarai from injury (Gen. xx. 4, 6). Josephus says that the cause of these plagues was revealed to Pharaoh by the priests.—**20. And they sent him away**] The term implies that he was provided with an honourable escort to ensure his safe departure from Egypt. "The original term is often used for that kind of sending or conveying away which is marked by peculiar tokens of honour and respect, as when a guest is accompanied at his departure to some distance by his host and a party of friends" (*Bush*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-3.

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM.

The last chapter dealt with the human race *as a whole*, and thus furnished the elements of a universal history. In this chapter that history is contracted and becomes national. It is not the design of Scripture to record the famous deeds of all men everywhere, to trace the development of the kingdoms of this world, but rather to unfold the spiritual dealings of God with the race. The sacred historian, therefore, after marking the downward tendency of mankind, now calls attention to a man on whom God's light had shined, who was to be the only hope of a world which had well nigh perished in the ruins of its corruption. God chooses Abraham that He might make him a worthy ancestor of the children of faith, and the founder of a nation by means of which he was to illustrate the ways of His providence and grace. The knowledge of God had well nigh perished from the world, and the call of Abraham was a spiritual revival—a fresh starting-place in the religious history of mankind. In the call of Abraham, we may observe—

1. That it was manifestly Divine. The patriarch did not by study and meditation *discover* the course of duty which he afterwards obeyed. The idea did not arise in his own mind, but was suggested to him from a source purely Divine. St. Stephen says that "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham." There was some visible manifestation of the Divine glory, and an authentic voice was heard. Since the last recorded communication from heaven, 422 years had passed away, and now God speaks again to Abraham. This call could not have been an illusion, for—1. *To obey it, he gave up all that was dear and precious to him in the world.* He gave up country, home, friends, and entered upon an untried path, committing himself to unknown chances. He could not have made such a sacrifice without a sufficient reason. The early Christians submitted to persecution, even unto death, because they *knew* that the alleged facts of their religion were true. The conduct of

Abraham can only be explained by the fact that he acted upon a real communication from God, and not from an impression. 2. *The course of conduct he followed could not be of human suggestion.* Abraham was not driven from his country by adverse circumstances, or attracted by the promise of plenty elsewhere. He might have followed the usual policy of the world, and made the best of things as they are. But he left a condition which would then be considered as prosperous, and cheerfully accepted whatever trials might await him. The whole of his character and destiny were changed. Natural causes cannot account for so sudden and marked a change. The "word" of God alone has power like this. An ignorant idolater cannot be turned to the ways of true religion, and a life of faith, without the operation of a Divine power. Flesh and blood could not have revealed this to Abraham. 3. *The history of the Church confirms the fact that the call was Divine.* The Christian Church was but a continuation of the Jewish, with added light and fresh blessings. That Church must have had an origin in the dim past, sufficient to account for the fact of its existence. If the world had lapsed into idolatry this new spiritual nation could not have arisen, unless God had raised up a founder for it—a new centre around which He could gather a chosen people. The Church can be traced back to the grey morning of history in which one great figure appears, which shines through all the succeeding ages, and still will shine until the course of man on earth is run. The blessings which the Church has enjoyed, and still shall enjoy, throughout all time, are the blessings which God promised to Abraham. The Church of God is a *fact*, and something strange and unusual must have happened in the past history of the world to account for it. The name of Abraham is so closely connected with the doctrines of the Gospel, as delivered in the New Testament, that to throw doubt upon the reality of his history would go very far towards destroying the foundations of the Christian religion. Christian believers now do but repeat the history of this patriarch, for they are all called of God, as was Abraham.

II. It demanded great sacrifices. Upon the Divine call Abraham was not immediately rewarded with temporal blessings. Appearances were altogether against his deriving any advantages from obedience. He was called upon to make great sacrifices, with no human prospect of compensation. 1. *He had to sever the ties of country.* It is natural for a man to love his native land, the scenes of his earliest years and first impressions. A man's country becomes hallowed in the course of years by many tender associations. The youth may leave his native land with little regret, but to the old man it is like tearing some firm attachment from his heart. To have been suddenly called to leave his country must have been no small trial to Abraham. 2. *He had to sever the ties of kindred.* Natural relationships form a strong bond of unity, and awaken a peculiar love. A man must have a stronger affection for his own flesh and blood than for the rest of the human race. He clings with a fond attachment to those who were the guardians of his early life. These are the most sacred of natural ties, and to sever them touches the deepest fountains of human emotion. Abraham was called upon to make this sacrifice at a time when he could feel it most. 3. *He had to sever the ties of home.* This is narrower than kindred, and signifies all the dear and precious things that form our domestic circle, or lie nearest our heart. Man has a kind of instinctive belief in a home, some sacred spot where he can find rest and comfort and be secure from invasion. There he has sanctuary. To sever the ties of home with the prospect of some sufficient advantage elsewhere may be justified as a call of duty, or devotion to some high principle; still the act itself is a real sacrifice. Abraham had reasons for leaving his home; yet in making up his mind to this he must needs have felt the pangs which nature gives.

III. It was an example of faith. The promise was made in general terms, and the good things to come, as far as Abraham was personally concerned, placed at an inaccessible distance. God did not tell him that He would give him the land, but merely *show* it to him. And as a fact of history he did not possess the good land. To act upon a promise like this required strong faith. 1. *Faith is required to brave the terrors of the unknown.* Abraham went forth upon his untried journey without any clear idea as to where he was going, or what might await him along his course. The unknown is ever the terrible, and we can only enter it with any confidence or hope when supported by the mysterious power of faith. Spiritual men derive the whole force and energy of their superior life from the influence of the distant and unknown. Faith is the power which links these to the present, and makes them a reality to the soul. 2. *Faith trusts in God.* Abraham did not know where he was going, but, like St. Paul, he knew "whom he had believed." That faith which merely believes the truth *concerning* God is dead, but that faith which believes *in* God is powerful and energetic. Such faith is not an attachment to some system of truth which the mind may languidly receive; it is trust in a *person.* "Abraham believed God." By the adoption of certain forms, and assents to creeds, we may have corporate religion, but *personal religion* can only arise from the soul's direct dealings with its God. God did not explain all the reasons of His strange commands and dealings to Abraham, yet Abraham trusted Him. 3. *In religious faith there is an element of reason.* Religion does not require us to exercise a blind faith. We have to venture something, but still we have sufficient reason to justify us in the step. The call of God may demand of us that we should go *beyond* what reason could point out, but never that we should act *contrary* to reason. The children of the truth recognise the voice of truth as soon as they hear it. There is something in the nature of their souls to which the truth is agreeable. There is a purer instinct in man, which to follow is the highest reason. Abraham was one of those to whom God appeared, and he felt that it was reasonable to obey the high command. It was enough for him to know that it was God who spoke, and God could only have a high and worthy purpose in view in all His commands to the children of men. To follow the promptings of faith is the noblest act of human reason.

IV. It was accompanied by promise. Though God does not explain all the reasons of His dealings to believers, and show them every step of the way in which they shall be led, yet He gives them sufficient encouragement by promises of future good. Abraham was assured that the advantages of obedience would be great. To employ an expression of Matthew Henry's, he might be a "loser *for* God, but not a loser *by* Him." The promises made to Abraham may be considered in a twofold light. 1. *As they concerned himself, personally.* He would have compensation for all the worldly loss he would have to endure. The nature of the affections of the soul cannot endure that they should remain without a proper object. If one hope is taken away from a man, he must have another. If he is forbidden to love some object unworthy of his affection, some other must be provided for him. Abraham had to lose much, and it was necessary that he should have reason for believing that God would be able to give him much more than this. There is a "better and an enduring substance" which more than compensates for all the sacrifices which faith demands. The several promises made to Abraham corresponded, in each case, to the sacrifices he was called upon to make. (1) *For the loss of country, God promised that He would make him a great nation.* His own nation was fast sinking into idolatry, and had he remained in it he must have caught the contagion of the times, and continued ignorant of the true religion. It was a double blessing to be delivered from such a nation, and to be made the head of another for which such an illustrious history was preparing. (2) *For the loss of his place of birth, God promised to bless him with a higher prosperity.* Abraham had much to leave behind—all his prospects of wealth and comfort, but God said, "I will bless thee." That blessing included all prosperity; as much as was needful, and sufficient for this life, and in the world to come life everlasting. (3) *For the loss of family distinction, God promised to make his name great.* Abraham had to leave his "father's house," but he was destined in the providence of God to build up a more famous and lasting house. These promises may be considered—2. *In his relation to humanity.* God said, "Thou shalt be a blessing." This promise implied something grander and nobler than any personal benefits which Abraham could inherit. It was the higher blessing—the larger benefit. Religion means something more than the selfish enjoyment of spiritual good, and he who only considers the interests of his own soul has failed to catch the true spirit of it. Man approaches the nature of God when he becomes a source of blessing to others. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Abraham was to be a blessing to mankind in the *highest* sense. Along his line were to flow all the benefits of salvation, and all the precious gifts of the covenant of grace. Other men have blessed the world with useful works and inventions, and with the gifts of literature and science, but he who is chosen by God to be an instrument in the world's salvation is the greatest benefactor to the race. As a further expansion of this blessing promised to Abraham—(1) His cause was henceforth to be *identified with the cause of God.* "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee" (verse 3). "God promised further, so to take sides with Abraham in the world, as to make common cause with him—share his friendships, and treat his enemies as His own. This is the highest possible pledge. This threatening against hostile people was signally fulfilled in the case of the Egyptians, Edomites, Amalekites, Moabites, Ammonites, and the greater nations—Assyrian, Chaldean, Persian, Greek, and Roman, which have fallen under the curse of God as here denounced against the enemies of the Church and kingdom of Christ. The Church is God's. Her enemies are His. Her friends are His also, and no weapon that is formed against her shall prosper, for He who has all power given unto Him shall be with her faithful servants, even to the end of the world' (*Jacobus*). 3. *He was to be the source of the highest blessing to mankind* "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Heb. *Of the ground.* The ground was cursed in Adam, now it was to be blessed in Abraham. The world was to be blessed *in families*, for the family is the first of all relationships, the most lasting of all institutions, and the best representative of the love of God, who is the Father of all mankind. By virtue of the Sonship of Christ Jesus we are made members of the household of God. It is God's design to bless the world by means of a *family*, hence in the fulness of time His own Son took flesh and blood of the children of Abraham, entered into our human relationships that He might bless all the families of the earth. In all this, there are three great principles involved. (1) *That it is God's plan to help man by means of man.* The system of mediators prevails throughout all human affairs. Nature ministers to us, and we have to minister one to the other. God brought spiritual succour to the human race, not directly but by means of the family of Abraham. (2) *That it is God's plan to help man by means of the human in conjunction with the divine.* No one of the human race, however illustrious, could redeem mankind. All were tainted by sin, stricken by the same disease, equally weak and impotent to save. It was necessary, therefore, for God to take hold on human nature in order to procure the salvation of mankind. Hence St. Paul teaches that by the seed of Abraham, by which the world was to be blessed, was meant Jesus Christ. "He saith not, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. iii. 16). The promise made to Abraham does not distinctly mention the

God-man, yet in the progress of revelation it gradually narrows to this. Abraham rejoiced to see the day of Christ, and though dimly, yet still with a real perception, of which this is the account. (3) *That the catholic spirit belongs to all stages of inspiration.* The Old Testament is not narrow, exclusive, and confined, for it speaks here of blessings to come to all families of the earth. The New Testament can have no wider aim, and merely speaks of this gracious purpose as being accomplished. God's design to construct a family of saints built upon the Sonship of Christ was revealed to Abraham, and therefore St. Paul declares that in this promise the Gospel was preached to him beforehand. (Gal. iii. 8–16.)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. God's speaking to man—(1) Should inspire reverence and worship; (2) should put an end to doubt; (3) should be a sufficient basis for faith; (4) should command obedience.

Revelation consists of communications made by God to men, who, to say the least, were above the average of mankind in purity and nobility of character.

The call of Abraham—(1) A manifestation of the grace of God. Others may have been as worthy, or, if not, they might have been fitted for such a purpose, but the Divine choice rested upon him. Here was *grace*, by which God takes the lead in human salvation, and in calling men to special services in the Church. Abraham did not choose the Lord, but the Lord him. 2. Peremptory. There was no room for debate. Abraham must obey at once, for the danger was great. The world was fast sinking into idolatry, and provoking the judgment of God. The faith must be saved in a man of heaven's choice. 3. Authoritative. There was a clear revelation from God. The authority could not be questioned. A man must not contend with his Maker. 4. Painful. Obedience to it was hard for flesh and blood. 5. It required faith. The voice that called was authoritative and commanding, yet since the believer cannot know all the journey, or through what untried things he shall have to pass, he must exercise faith. God's promise to Abraham was such as he could not immediately realise, and to the end of his life he would have to exercise faith, and he died in faith.

A similar command is virtually given to us. We are not, indeed, called to leave our country and connections; but to withdraw our affections from earthly things, and fix them upon things above, we *are* called. The world around us lies in wickedness; we are not to love it or the things that are in it; we are rather to come out from it, and to be crucified to it; we are to regard it as a wilderness through which we are passing to our Father's house, and in our passage through it to consider ourselves as strangers and pilgrims. If we meet with good accommodation and kind treatment, we are to be thankful; if we meet with briars and thorns in our way, we must console ourselves with the thought that it is the appointed way, and that every step still brings us nearer home. We are to be looking forward to our journey's end, and to be proceeding towards it, whatever be the weather, or whatever the road. Thus we are to fulfil our pilgrimage to the heavenly Canaan in the same spirit as did Abraham to the earthly.—(*Bush.*)

When "God chose Abraham" (Neh. ix. 7) it was an act of free and sovereign grace. He did not, on this occasion, make choice of Melchizedek, who was already in the Holy Land, and was faithfully sustaining there the offices of a king of righteousness and peace, and a priest of the Most High God. The Lord is found of those who seek Him not. He comes to Abraham dwelling afar off, and if not hostile, at least indifferent, to the truth; to him He reveals Himself—him He chooses—him He calls. To Abraham, while yet ungodly, God, intending to "justify the heathen through faith, preaches the Gospel, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed" (Gal. iii. 8).—(*Candlish.*)

The call of Abraham was the first act of God towards the formation of a Church. It was the design of God that faith should proceed from one believer to all in like manner as from one Saviour redemption should flow to all.

It is common to find that a nation imbibes the spirit of its founder. Nimrod, the founder of the Assyrian monarchy, was a conqueror, and the Assyrians were pre-eminently a conquering nation. But in the founder of the Jewish nation we find, not a conqueror, nor a law-giver, but a *saint*, remarkable only for this, that he lived with God; and therefore we may expect to meet with what is really the case, not a profane history, but the history of piety.—(*Robertson.*)

Verse 2. The promise, "I will make of thee a great nation," required faith in a most eminent degree. 1. There was the barrier of a natural improbability. Sarai was barren, which was a difficulty in the way of his faith, hard to be overcome. Abraham felt that afterwards, and lent himself to a device for bringing about the promise, by means which God had not appointed. 2. The promise could not receive sufficient fulfilment until after his death. A great nation can only be built up in the course of long centuries. 3. Abraham had not the encouragement of example. There was no nation then existing that could be called truly great. A believer has great encouragement when he can look back upon what God has done for His saints in the past, when he hears of the "noble works that God did in their days;" but Abraham had not this. He had to face things altogether new and untried.

A nation which God makes, though it may not actually fulfil the Divine ideal, must possess some elements of spiritual work not enjoyed by any other. Abraham was the father of a nation which preserved pure the revelation of God, and out of which the true monarch of human souls was to arise.

The promise had reference to things which could be but of small account to an eye of sense; but faith would find enough in it to satisfy the most enlarged desires. The objects, though distant, were worth waiting for. He should be the father of *a great nation*, and what was of greater account, and which was doubtless understood, that nation should be the Lord's. God Himself would *bless him;* and this would be more than the whole world without it. He would also *make his name great;* not in the records of worldly fame, but in the history of the Church; and being himself full of the blessing of the Lord, it should be his to impart blessedness to the world. "I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing." This promise has been fulfilling ever since. All the true blessedness which the world is now, or shall hereafter be possessed of, is owing to Abraham and his posterity. Through them we have a Bible, a Saviour, and a Gospel. They are the stock on which the Christian Church is grafted. Their very dispersions and punishments have proved the riches of the world. What then shall be their recovery but life from the dead! It would seem that the conversion of the Jews, whenever it shall take place, will be a kind of resurrection to mankind. Such was the hope of this calling. And what could the friends of God or man desire more?—(*Fuller.*)

What constitutes a great nation? 1. A nation where righteousness dwells is great. Abraham was accounted righteous before God, being justified by faith. He stamped his own spirit and character upon his nation, whose history has furnished long lines of remarkable saints. 2. A nation on which God's blessing descends is great. No nation can be truly great that does not keep and cherish the revelation of God. There must be the possession of spiritual truth before the highest blessing can be enjoyed. It was this that made the Jews superior to other nations in the chief things which concern man. (1) They had the most noble conceptions of God. Among the heathen nations the idea of God was debased by the most degrading conceptions. A few superior minds could reach to better and purer thoughts of the Divinity, yet how cold are their abstractions when compared with the majesty of the idea furnished by the Hebrew Scriptures! It was only in Judah that God was truly known, and in Israel that His name was truly great. (2) They had the purest morality. What a contrast between the moral law of the Jews and that of the nations around them throughout the whole course of their history! God's blessing conveys the inheritance of the highest moral principles. (3) They felt that they were the subjects of Divine government. The religion of the Jews taught them that they were not under the rule of fate or chance, but of Providence. They learned to trace all their disasters to disobedience to God. What nation was ever taught as they, by so severe a discipline, that a people can only fail through lack of righteousness! 3. That nation is great which is a source of blessing to others. The Jewish nation gave the world the Scriptures and a Redeemer. No nation can be truly great from which the word of God and the blessings of the Gospel do not go forth to others. To be the centre of spiritual life and light is the highest distinction.

His believing this so unhesitatingly and so manifestly with all his heart—his taking God simply at His word, asking no questions and raising no difficulties—is itself a wonder. He might have started many objections, and made many anxious inquiries. How can these things be? How can he, whose wife is barren, be the father of a great nation? How can he, who is a man of unclean lips, be at once so graciously received into favour, when his eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts? And how is he to become so awful a sign of trial, and so fruitful a source of good, to his brethren and to all men? But Abraham stands not upon any such scruples. He takes the plain testimony of the God of glory—"I will bless thee;" I, who alone can bless, and whose high prerogative and right to bless none may question—I will bless thee; and if I justify, who is he that condemneth? It is enough. Abraham believes—"Be it unto me, Lord, according to Thy word"—and he is blessed in believing; blessed, as having his iniquity forgiven, his transgressions covered, his sin imputed no more, and his spirit freed from guile (Psalm xxxii. 1, 2; Rom. iv. 6–8), even as the spirit of a little child is free from guile when he is found trusting at once, implicitly and for ever, his parent's eye, word, and heart. But have we not in all this something more than an exercise of belief competent to the natural man? Have we not that faith which is "the gift of God"? (Eph. ii. 8.)—(*Candlish.*)

I will magnify, or make thy name great. This concerns his repute, because, being called from his own, he might justly fear disrespect among strangers. God encourageth him by this that He will make his name famous, that is for piety, virtue, goodness, and power. It contains—1. A greatening of all good, which is the ground of true honour and respect among the best. 2. A greatening of the fame and report of all this in the ears of the inhabitants of the earth. Now this was effected both in Abram's person and in his seed. And such a good and great name is a precious ointment, a sweet blessing.—(*Hughes.*)

Verse 3. Such an assurance is the highest pledge of friendship and favour that can be given, and sets forth the privileges of the Lord's chosen in the most impressive light. The strictest leagues and covenants of kings and princes contain no stronger bond of alliance than the engagement to regard each other's friends and enemies as common friends and enemies.—(*Bush.*)

God considers as done to Himself the wrongs and insults done to His people.

God deals with nations according to their treatment of His people. The Church is a serious factor in the political history of the world.

God is in league for the offensive part, to be an enemy also unto his enemies. Two words are here used—1. That upon the part of the enemy signifieth to set light by, and so to vilify or reproach, which God takes notice of to judge. 2. The word upon God's part is to curse unto perdition; so much is God incensed against the enemies of His covenanted ones.—(*Hughes.*)

In Abram is this blessing laid up as a treasure hid in a field to be realised in due time. *All the families* of mankind shall ultimately enter into the enjoyment of this unbounded blessing. Thus, when the Lord saw fit to select a man to preserve vital piety on the earth and to be the head of a race fitted to be the depositary of a revelation of mercy, He at the same time designed that this step should be the means of effectually calling the sin-enthralled world to the knowledge and love of Himself. The race was twice already since the fall put upon its probation—once under the promise of victory to the seed of the woman, and again under the covenant with Noah. In each of these cases, notwithstanding the growing light of revelation and accumulating evidence of the Divine forbearance, the race had apostatised from the God of mercy with lamentably few known exceptions. Yet undeterred by the gathering tokens of this second apostasy, and after reiterated practical demonstration to all men of the debasing, demoralising effects of sin, the Lord, with calm determination of purpose, sets about another step in the great process of removing the curse of sin, dispensing the blessing of pardon, and eventually drawing all the nations to accept His mercy. The special call of Abram contemplates the calling of the Gentiles as its final issue, and is therefore to be regarded as one link in a series of wonderful events, by which the legal obstacles of the Divine mercy are to be taken out of the way, and the Spirit of the Lord is to prevail with still more and more of men to return to God.—(*Murphy.*)

The passage contains a clear intimation of what God Himself, whose judgment is according to truth, regards as the source of the truest and richest blessings to the children of men. It is not wealth, fame, power, sensual pleasure, or mental endowments, but the gift of His own Son as a Saviour, the bestowment of the Holy Spirit, the pardon of sin, peace of conscience, and the high and purifying hopes connected with eternal life. This is the inheritance that makes us truly rich; and utterly vain, foolish, and fatal it is to seek it from any other source.—(*Bush.*)

The first promise of a Messiah was *victory* through the seed of the woman. The second promise was *blessing* for all mankind. Thus God gradually reveals His gracious purpose with ever-enlarging ground of encouragement and hope.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 4–9.

ABRAM ON HIS JOURNEY.—THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH.

Faith in God implies something more than listening to His voice, and receiving as truth what He reveals. It is a living principle which must show itself in action. Abram is now on his journey in obedience to the command of God. We have here an instance of the belief of the heart, as distinguished from a mere intellectual assent. When a man believes with the heart, he acts upon that belief; he is full of energy, and to obey the will of God is his meat and drink—the means by which his true life is sustained. We have here an example of the obedience of faith.

I. It was prompt (ver. 4). Abram had left Ur of the Chaldees, and now he must leave Haran, the place of his father's sepulchre. Devotion to the memory of an aged parent might tempt him to linger there, but he obeys the stronger claims of God and presses forwards to the Promised Land. He breaks the closest ties of nature, and having just light enough to walk by—but not for full knowledge—he accepts the difficulties and trials of a life of faith. Like St. Paul, he acted upon his convictions at once, gave no opportunity for counter influences to operate, and "conferred not with flesh and blood." There was in his obedience an appearance of hurry, of impetuosity. Worldly prudence imposes caution upon men in taking any new important step. Friends and interests have to be consulted, and probabilities of success must be calculated. A wise man, in the affairs of this life, will do nothing rashly. Hence the popular maxim that "second thoughts are best." And that maxim is true when applied to ordinary affairs, for in these to act on the first impulse is unsafe. But this advice is not good when applied to matters which concern the soul. In those things which regard the conscience, first thoughts are the truest and best. He is a wise man in the things of this world who pauses to consider before he commits himself to any important step, but he is a foolish man who, in the things of the eternal world, delays between the thought and the action. When God commands, to delay is to be disobedient. Faith makes haste to obey. The children of faith, in serving God, are set free from all other masters. The authority under which they act is supreme, and therefore they have no need for deliberation. Such was Abram—ready to hear the Divine voice, prompt to obey it.

II. It was considerate of the interests of others. After the death of his father, Abraham took his providential place as the leader of the colony. He sought to urge others to obedience to the Divine will by the force of his authority, or by the milder influence of his example. He was known to his Maker as one who would command his household after him, and win them to the ways of righteousness. True piety is never selfish. He who has received the mercy of heaven catches the spirit of the Divine benevolence, and longs for others to share the same blessings. He partakes of that blessed Spirit whose chief attribute is liberality. Abraham was not content to be a solitary servant of God—to be absorbed in attention to the salvation of his own soul. Religion contemplates no man as an isolated portion of humanity, but rather in his relation to others. The fire of devotion is not only hot within, but resplendent without, giving light to all around. The lights of the world, like the sun, are public—they are intended to bless far and wide. The call of Abraham had regard to the spiritual interests of others. Religion implies *society*. Where "two or three are gathered together," God is present to bless. It is not in lonely solitude that the righteous man enjoys the blessings of salvation; he *partakes* thereof with others. God designed to found a Church by means of His servant Abraham, who was thus to be a source of blessing to all nations. The life of faith acquires a sublime value by the consciousness that its blessings are shared by other souls. 1. *The believer's joy is increased.* Religion is not a cold assent of the understanding, but engages the affections of the heart. When the heart is full the joy that swells it must overflow. 2. *The believer's idea of God is enhanced.* He thinks of the benevolence of God as plenteous and wide. 3. *The believer's faith is greatly strengthened.* It is possible to imagine a faith so real and well-founded that a man could hold it against all the world. Still, he who is quite alone in his faith labours under great disadvantages. He is liable to many discouragements, and often tempted to doubt as to whether he is right. A man's confidence is greatly increased when he meets with another believer. Religion in man requires the aid of society.

III. It was maintained in the midst of difficulties. To all human appearance, Abraham had little else than discouragement throughout the whole of his course. However much he might have been inwardly supported, an ordinary observer could not discern that he had received any real benefit from his belief in God. 1. *He was a wanderer in the land which God had promised to give him.* He has no estate or dominion there assigned to him, but travels about as a wanderer from place to place. This was a continual difficulty in the way of faith in a promise that God would give him that land to dwell in. 2. *He is beset by enemies.* "The Canaanite was then in the land" (ver. 6). Others were already in possession, so that he could not pass through the country without challenge. One would have thought that, having received the Divine promise, which seemed to speak of temporal good in abundance, his way would have been made clear before him, and he would have but to rest and enjoy. 3. *The Divine promise opened up for him no splendid prospect in this world.* The land was to be given not to himself but to his "seed." In the case of the patriarch himself the promise appeared to point to an earthly reward, but in reality had no such fulfilment. To Abraham himself "He gave none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on" (Acts vii. 5). The promise referred to things remote and beyond the limits of his own earthly life. Here was faith which could trust in God against all appearances, and when denied of a present earthly reward. The children of this world are under the tyranny of the present. They believe that one now is worth many hereafters—one good actually in possession is worth more than a doubtful and late reversion. The faith of Abraham regarded a prospect higher than this world. It was enough for him that God had spoken and He would fulfil His word in His own way.

IV. It respected the outward forms of piety. Abraham was not satisfied with private devotion—with those exercises of the soul, which, though true and real, are invisible to others. He made a public profession and exhibition of his faith. He "built an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord" (verse 8). Of such an action we may say—1. *It was unworldly.* When the men of this world find a fruitful plain, they build a city and a tower to enhance their own greatness, and to transmit their fame to coming generations. The children of faith make it the first duty to raise an altar to God. They regard all things as consecrated to Him whose they are, and whom they serve. The action of Abraham in building an altar amounted to the taking possession of the land for God. Thus the believer holds the gifts of Providence as the steward of them, and not as their possessor. 2. *It satisfied a pious instinct which meets some of the difficulties of devotion.* It is difficult for man to realise the invisible without the aid of the visible. Hence the pious in all ages have built places in which to worship God. This arises from no desire to limit God in space; but in order that men might feel that He is present everywhere, they must feel that He is specially present somewhere. God meets man by coming down to his necessity. 3. *It was a public profession of his faith.* Abraham was not one of those who hid the righteousness of God in his heart. He made it known to all around him by outward acts of devotion. Such conduct glorifies God, and gives religion the advantage that is derived from the corporate life of those who profess it. 4. *It was an acknowledgment of the claims of God.* By building an altar and calling upon the name of the Lord, Abraham confessed that all claims were on the side of God and not on that of man. He confessed that sin requires *expiation*, and that all true help and reward must come to man from above. The only religion possible to man is that of penitence and faith.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 4. Obedience to the utmost of the Word of God is the necessary issue of a sound faith.—(*Hughes.*)

The rule of the believer's life is what God has spoken. The Divine word directs him in the way.

No sooner did Abraham receive the Divine command than he obeyed it. When acting in the ordinary affairs of life, and from mere worldly considerations, prudence may dictate delay, and the propriety of consulting friendly advice, but when the call is evidently from above, when the direction is clearly from God, to be dilatory is to be disobedient. Faith is prompt in compliance, and makes haste to execute the will of our Heavenly Master. Though the journey to be undertaken was above three hundred miles in length, and rendered formidable by deserts, high mountains, and thick forests, yet the patriarch implicitly puts himself under the conduct of that Providence whose summons had called him forth, and following its leadings bade defiance to difficulty and danger. (*Bush.*)

Every true believer longs for companions in his faith.

"So Abram departed." So starts the spirit of faith. Long is the struggle to leave "father's house." To go forth "not knowing whither we go," is trial enough. To go forth from "father's house" at once seems impossible. Thus the old man of our fallen spiritual life, though it cannot really help us to Canaan, is still clung to. Indeed, at first it seems to help us. It is written, not Abram took Terah, but "Terah took Abraham;" for often some energy which is really corrupt is active, apparently in a good direction, when the elect is called. But Terah never passes Jordan; he can reach Chanan, no further. Having got thus far he has been long enough pilgrim, "he dwells there." . . . . Once with the old man leading us we went forth to go into the land of Canaan; but we only got to Chanan and dwelt there. But the old man was buried; then again we started to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan we came.—(*Jukes: Types of Genesis.*)

Verse 5. He who shows the obedience of faith is fitted to be a leader of other souls.

Piety moves along the lines of natural affection. A man may desire most of all the salvation of his own household, without deserving the imputation of narrowness and partiality.

No great spiritual work is wrought in any soul without affecting many others.

Though the sense of "making proselytes" is not conveyed by the words in their primary meaning, yet they are expressly thus rendered in the Jerusalem Targum; and the Chaldee paraphrase has, "All the souls which he had subdued unto the law," and the fact that Abraham is afterwards said to have had three hundred and eighteen *trained* (*Heb.* catechised) servants in his house, as well as his acknowledged character as a pious man, makes the supposition altogether probable. The true sense of the phrase, at any rate, so nearly approximates to this, that we cannot hesitate to adduce the example of Abraham as an admonition to us, that, wherever the providence of God shall place us, there we are to labour to be "makers of souls," to gain proselytes to our Heavenly Master, to increase to the utmost the number of those who shall devote themselves to His fear and service.—(*Bush.*)

Faith moveth souls only to the Land of Promise. Such was Canaan, Heb. xi. 9; good in itself, Deut. viii. 7, 8, 9, Ezek. xx. 6; Jehovah's Land, Hosea ix. 3; Holy Land, Zech. ii. 12; Land of Immanuel, Isa. viii. 8; a type of heaven, Heb. xi. 9, 10.—(*Hughes.*)

Verse 6. Pilgrimage is noticed first. Abram dwells in tents to the end, possessing nothing here save a burial place. And the spirit in us, which obeys God's call, will even yet dwell in tents and be a pilgrim. The old man may rest in outward things and be settled, but the spirit of faith has here no certain dwelling-place. Its tent is often stretched by rains and winds; yet the spirit of faith lives, and by these very trials is kept from many snares. For the called one cannot be as Moab, "settled on his lees." "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, he hath settled on his lees, he hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity; therefore his taste remaineth in him, his scent is not changed" (Jer. xlviii. 11). Abram, and David, and Israel, have all been emptied from vessel to vessel. Pilgrimage is their appointed lot, because true life is always progressing, moving. In the course of this discipline, trials befall them which others never meet with; failures, too, are seen, such as we never see in the prudent worldly man. When did Nahor go down to Egypt, or deny his wife? When did Saul, like David, go down to Achish, and play the madman? But in this same course God is seen, and man is learnt.—(*Jukes: Types of Genesis.*)

The children of faith are but pilgrims in this world. Others are in possession of the land: *they* are bound elsewhere.

The believer should follow the command of God, though, to all human appearance, no definite end be reached. A strong faith should be able to bear the utmost trial.

This first halting place of Abram and his household in the Land of Promise was the "City of Samaria, called Sychar," where Our Lord sowed the early seeds of His Gospel doctrine in His conversation with the Samaritan woman (John iv. 5); and it was the same place at which Philip first preached in the transition of the Christian Church from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts vii. 5), where it should be rendered "*a city of Samaria*"—the phrase being the very same in the Greek as in John iv. 5.—(*Jacobus.*)

The enemies of God are still in the land through which we pass in our faith's journey. The believer is more than a *pilgrim* on the earth, he is also a *stranger*.

Verse 7. He who created the spirit of man can have access to it in whatever way it pleases Him.

God does more than act upon men by the outward circumstances of life. He can appear to the spirit of man and impress it by His presence and His word.

"And the Lord appeared unto Abram." A reference to various other passages where a similar event is described, leads to the belief that such manifestations were vouchsafed for the most part in dreams and visions of the night, when supernatural revelations were made in such a way as to carry the evidence of their Divinity along with them. But until we know more of the nature of spirits and of the mode of spiritual communications, we must be content to abide in comparative ignorance on this whole matter. Certain it is that that Almighty power which has raised our bodies from the dust, which has formed the eye and planted the ear, and whose inspiration hath given us understanding, can avail itself of any avenue that it pleases to reach the sentient spirits of His creatures, whether in their sleeping or waking moments, and impart the knowledge of His will. To the pious and humble mind it will be matter rather of devout admiration and praise than of curious research, that the Father of our spirits is thus pleased to manifest His presence in the secret chambers of the soul, and by unknown channels to infuse strength, peace, confidence, and refreshing joy into the hearts of His servants, who are disposed to make sacrifices and to encounter perils for His sake. The Scriptures teem with assurance to such that they, like Abraham, shall not fail of their reward, even in the present life.—(*Bush.*)

In the deepest trials God often manifests Himself most clearly. If the call of faith seems hard to flesh and blood, the warrant of it will be made all the stronger. The revelation of God is graduated to the needs of the soul.

When God is seen by the inner eye, then only has a man true spiritual knowledge. All other religion but that which is in this way derived is but the religion of tradition or authority; and does not rest upon that real knowledge of the truth which comes of the vision of God. The "inspiration of the Almighty" is the source of man's understanding and true wisdom.

God reveals Himself and His purposes gradually, so rewarding one degree of faith as to beget another. The land was first *shown* to Abraham, and afterwards the promise was uttered that God would *give* it to him.

"There he builded an altar unto the Lord." 1. The spiritual feelings of the soul express themselves in outward acts of devotion. 2. The gifts of God should be consecrated to His service. Noah thus consecrated the new world, and now Abraham the Land of Promise. 3. The believer should assure himself of a title to his inheritance. Abraham, by building an altar, took possession of the land on the ground of the right secured to him by faith. However poor and unpromising the prospect around us, we can secure our title to the heavenly Canaan.

As he went along he erected altars to commemorate the mercies of God, and to remind his posterity that this was really their own land. Here we have that strange feeling of human nature, the utter impossibility of realising the invisible except through the visible. Churches, what are they built for? To limit God and bind Him down to space? or to explain God to us, to enable us to understand Him, and to teach us that not there *only*, but in every place He is present? Consider then what the land of Canaan became. Gradually it was dotted over with these stones, teaching the Israelites that it was a sacred land. What these stones did for the Israelites our memory does for us; it brings back in review our past life. Remember, I pray you, what that life will be to you when it all appears again. Blessed, thrice blessed, is the man to whom life is as it was to Abram, dotted over with memorials of communion with God. But *your* life—that guilty thought and act, that unhallowed feeling—dare you see it come before you again? I pray you remember that this return of all the past, to memory, in the day when God shall judge your life, is no dream, but one of the things that must be hereafter.—(*Robertson.*)

Wherever he had a tent God had an altar, and an altar sanctified by prayer.—(*Henry.*)

Abraham erected an altar. 1. As a protest against the idolatry around him. He was everywhere surrounded by idolatrous neighbours, and it was due to his high calling to show allegiance to the true God. As the Canaanites were a fierce and proud people he would thereby expose himself to persecution. But he would not deny God even at the peril of his life. 2. As a pious example to his household. He was a man of some social distinction—the lord of a large household. We hear afterwards of his having "three hundred and eighteen trained servants, born in his own house." How great must have been the influence of his example upon these! They saw continually before them a hero of the faith who was not ashamed to confess the true God, amidst the ridicule and scorn of the heathen around him. 3. As a recognition of an atoning sacrifice for sin. Ever since the Fall all worship had to take account of the fact that sin requires expiation. "Though nothing is here stated of sacrificial offering, yet the building of an altar fairly implies this."—(*Jacobus.*)

On the hill east of this sacred ground Abram built another altar, and called upon the name of the Lord. Here we have the reappearance of an ancient custom instituted in the family of Adam after the birth of Enoch (Gen. iv. 26). Abram addresses God by His proper name Jehovah, with an audible voice in his assembled household. This, then, is a continuation of the worship of Adam with additional light according to the progressive development of the moral nature of man.—(*Murphy.*)

It is the characteristic of the members of the true Church of God that they call upon His name.

Verse 9. We may on various occasions change places, provided we carry the true religion with us; in this we must never change.—(*Fuller.*)

Abraham pulled up and pitched his tent, from point to point, during the course of his journey. Such is our condition as Christians. We have here "no continuing city," but are moving towards a permanent home. We do not dwell in tents, but our habitations in this world are sufficiently moveable to remind us that our true rest is not here. There is no fixity in our human life. Our houses change their inhabitants often, and we are passing on to other scenes.

To all points, East, and West, and South, God orders the motions of the saints, to leave some savour of His truth everywhere.—(*Hughes.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 10–20.

ABRAM IN EGYPT: THE TEMPTATIONS AND TRIALS OF A LIFE OF FAITH.

Hitherto in the life of Abram we have seen nothing but implicit obedience and heroic faith. We have seen a man who put himself entirely in the hands of God for the direction and control of his whole earthly course and destiny. Now, we have the same man under the trial of great affliction and perplexity betraying a want of confidence in God, and having a distorted sense of what is true and right. Under trial Abram showed those weaknesses which are common to man. Faith—even in the case of the most renowned saints—is not exempted from those imperfections which cling to all other virtues and graces. The whole of the religious life of man is complicated by his moral position in this world. The terrible facts of man's condition in this present life must be admitted. Divine grace has to work upon human souls tormented and distracted by many cares, tried by the temptations of the flesh and of the mind, and often in great perplexity, through the complications of human affairs, as to where the path of duty lies. The life of faith has many temptations and trials. Of these we may observe—

I. That they may arise from temporal calamities. Abram, who had hitherto lived in plenty, is now exposed to famine, and is in danger to lack and suffer hunger (ver. 10). He is literally starved out of the land, and is forced to go down to Egypt for help. Famine is one of the rods of God, which He uses to punish the wicked and to correct the penitent. It was necessary that the character of Abram should be perfected by the trial of affliction, for there is a hope which only comes to us through the ancestry of tribulation, patience, and experience. Man must know by the bitter experiment how weak he is, and that if he reaches any noble end at all his success must be ascribed to Divine grace alone. Still, the trials arising from temporal calamities are, for the present, grievous. 1. *They direct the whole care and attention of the mind to themselves.* Abram is now obliged by the pressure of want to leave the land of his sojourn, and to endure the hardships of a second exile. He is forced to do that by hard necessity which he would not do by choice or prompted by the spirit of adventure. The great calamities of life absorb all a man's care and attention. His whole energy is employed in seeking how he may deliver himself. Chiefest among these trials is the lack of daily bread. While this want is pressing upon a man his mind cannot suffer any other care. To make religion possible to man he must first of all *live.* His existence—however humble in some of its aspects—is the basis of all that is afterwards laid upon it. Hence in the Lord's Prayer the petition for daily bread comes first in order. It is a terrible trial to be in want of those things which are necessary for the support of physical life. Under the oppression of such a calamity a man can think of little else besides his own pressing want. 2. *They may suggest doubt in the Divine providence.* We can imagine a faith so strong as never to be disturbed by any doubt. A saint of God may say, in some exalted moments of spiritual life, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." But, considering what human nature is, great calamities may for a while cloud and obscure the sense of God's loving providence. There are times when it may be difficult for a man to realise that he has a Father above who knows his wants and cares for him. To Abram the visitation of famine would be peculiarly trying. He was in danger to lack and suffer hunger *in the land of promise and plenty.* It would be but natural that he should be tempted to regret that ever he had left his native land, and that he should call in question the Divine origin of the command that bade him encounter the trials and dangers of a wandering life. There was room for the temptation, though Abram sinned not in this. He still retained his hold upon the promise. 3. *They serve to give us an exaggerated estimate of past trials.* It would seem as if all calamities were now rushing upon Abram. Past trials would come back to him and renew his grief—the friends he had lost, the delay of promised good, the dangers of his pilgrimage. In great troubles it often happens that all the evils and sufferings of former years revive and oppress our souls by their multitude. Abram endured the trial of all his sorrows rushing upon him at once. But a life of faith has other temptations and trials.

II. They may arise from the difficulty of applying the principles of religion to the moral problems of life. Abram knew that his wife's beauty would expose her to danger in the court of Pharaoh, and that his own life might be sacrificed should it stand in the way of the foul desires of that licentious monarch. Therefore, to save himself, he has recourse to falsehood. He did not tell a full-orbed lie, but concealed a portion of the truth. His sin might be described as dissimulation, or, at least, equivocation. Though Abram was an example to all believers in the strength of his faith, yet he was not such an example in the application of it to the affairs of life. In our human experience complications often arise which make it difficult for us to act with due regard to the great principles of truth and righteousness. In applying such principles to special cases we are in danger of committing grievous moral errors. 1. *We may be tempted to have recourse to false prudence and expediency.* In the affairs of this life there is often a certain reticence imposed upon us which we can maintain consistently with our devotion to truth. Society drives us to the necessity of using many expedients of prudence. But there is a false prudence and expediency. We have no right to save ourselves by the sacrifice of truth. We should be true at all hazards. Abram evaded the truth, and acted as a man of the world, and not as a follower of righteousness. The path of duty often lies where we require much practical wisdom to enable us to walk sure footedly. Faith may be strong in us, and yet we (like Abram) may fail in applying the principles of it to special cases. Our constant temptation is to use doubtful means in order to save our own interests. 2. *We are exposed to the sin of tempting Providence.* It is probable that Abram regarded the course he adopted in the light of a provisional expediency, rendered necessary by the perplexing situation; and that he hoped that God would, in some way at last, extricate him from the difficulty. He had grievously entangled himself, and he looked to Divine Providence to untie the knot. But we have no right thus to tempt Providence by departing from the clear path of duty, and then expecting the evils we have thus brought upon ourselves shall be rectified. There are complications in our human life in which we are exposed to this sin of presumption. If we acknowledge God in all our ways, we may expect that He will direct us; but if we use our own wisdom, doubtful and imperfect at best, and often sinful, it is vain to hope that He will adjust all our difficulties. 3. *We may be tempted to preserve one good at the expense of another.* Abram had faith that whatever difficulties might arise in the future God would fulfil His promise. He knew that the promise was intimately connected with himself. The word which God had given him implied the preservation of his own life. With a devotion commendable in itself, he fastens upon the promise as a desired good, and he is ready to sacrifice any other good in order that the promise might stand firm. He will preserve the blessing even at the expense of the honour of his wife. Such are some of the moral perplexities of human life. They expose us to the temptation of casting away one virtue in order to preserve another. 4. *They may tempt us to hesitate concerning what is right.* When we have clear principles of duty to guide us there ought to be no hesitation. Conscience should be obeyed at once. We should do what the spiritual instincts of the soul determine to be right, and leave the result to God. If we perform our duty, God will accomplish His purpose, no matter what stands in the way. But Abram hesitates when he had clear light on his duty, and devises the expedient of a man of this world but quite unworthy of a man of faith. It is dangerous to hesitate when our moral obligation is clear.

III. They are made the means of impressing valuable moral lessons. Abram would learn many lessons from his bitter experience in Egypt. 1. *That man cannot by his own strength and wisdom maintain and direct his own life.* Abram thought that he had acted prudently—that his own wisdom was sufficient. But he found that man must humbly depend upon God, and mistrust himself, if he would be preserved in the safe path of duty. Faith is not exempt from that imperfection which belongs to every other virtue exercised by weak and erring man. Our own wisdom will only bring us to confusion; God must direct our steps, else we can reach no worthy end. Abram learnt also—2. *That adverse circumstances may be made to work for good.* Abram's device had failed. The folly of his conduct appeared to his own confusion. Yet God so controlled events that they worked for his good. It is necessary sometimes that men learn wisdom by many and grievous failures. In the experiments of science, failures are often so much teaching. The labour of trial and investigation is not really lost. Important lessons are learned, and the mind is put upon the track of the truth. Our moral failures may serve to correct our errors and to deepen our sense of duty. It is the glory of God to bring good out of evil. Abram rose from the evil in which he had plunged himself with a stronger faith in God and His law. This was clear spiritual gain, though obtained by a painful and humiliating process. 4. *That a good man may fail in his chief virtue.* Moses was the meekest man of all the men that dwelt upon the face of the earth, yet it was he who spake unadvisedly with his lips. St. Peter, remarkable for his boldness, yet sinned through fear. Solomon, the wise, commits folly. Abram, the man of faith, by his dissimulation shows timid distrust in God; thinking that the Divine promise cannot be accomplished unless aided by the expedients of his wisdom.

IV. God is able to deliver from them all. When a man has the habitual intention of pleasing God, and when his faith is real and heart sincere, the lapses of his infirmity are graciously pardoned. God makes for him a way of escape, and grants the comfort of fresh blessings, and an improved faith. But, 1. *God often delivers His people in a manner humiliating to themselves.* "And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way" (ver. 18, 19). Here is the man of God rebuked by the man of the world—the Father of the Faithful taking a lesson in morality from a heathen! Pharaoh felt that he had been grievously wronged. Abram was taught the humiliating fact that his falsehood was unnecessary, and that had he adhered to the strict truth the difficulty would not have arisen. It is humiliating to be convicted of folly by men who are ignorant of the reality of religion. 2. *God delivers them by a way by which His own name is glorified in the sight of men.* The king saw that God had care of His people, that there was a sacred charm about their lives, and that their errors did not deprive them of the attentions of His love. He was taught by Divine judgment to respect the man of faith. God is careful of the honour of His servants, and glorifies His name in them in the sight of all men. Pharaoh might blame Abram, but he must have felt the majesty of the God whom Abram served.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 10. Here the patriarch meets a sore trial of his faith. A stranger in a strange land, having removed from his comfortable home and loving kindred, he finds himself in the midst of famine, and in danger of starvation. No corn trade as yet existed between these countries. He therefore determined to leave the land of promise for the land of Egypt, lest he might perish of want. . . . . Egypt being annually watered by the overflowing of the Nile, and not depending on rains for the crops, was the great grain-growing region, and corn could be found there when famine prevailed in the adjoining country (ch. xlii. 1, 2).—(*Jacobus.*)

Famine is the frequent scourge of uncivilised lands. The cultivation of man's intellectual and moral powers is necessary to the stability, comfort, and well-being of society. God has willed it that the powers and the happiness of mankind are to be enlarged by the struggle with natural difficulties.

The trials of God's people seldom come alone: one is the prelude to another.

We are reminded by the afflictions of our present state that this life is but a pilgrimage.

Abram goes down to Egypt only to sojourn there for a time, until the trouble be overpast. He still keeps his eye upon the Land of Promise, and his heart moves towards it. In all our wanderings here our soul should have a fixed centre.

As if all this were not enough to try him, even daily bread begins to fail him. He has hitherto been steadfast, he has "builded an altar" wherever he has dwelt, and has "called on the name of the Lord." He has at all hazards avowed his faith, and sought to glorify his God; but it seems as if, from very necessity, he must at last abandon the fruitless undertaking. He is literally starved out of the land. Why, then, should he not go back to his ancient dwelling-place, and try what good he can do, remaining quietly at home? There he would find peace and plenty; and he might seem to have a good reason, or at least a sufficient excuse, for retracing his steps. But he is still faithful, and rather than draw back he will even encounter yet greater dangers. He will go down into Egypt for a time.—(*Candlish.*)

It was a grievous trial to Abram to be called of God to a high destiny, and then to find himself plunged into all the horrors of a famine. In more than one circumstance of his life did the Father of the Faithful believe against all human hope.

Verse 11. Abram cannot draw nigh to Egypt without some misgiving as to his moral and social safety. He seems to have been a stranger to such a feeling before, betraying no apprehension in all his journeyings from Ur to Haran, and from Haran through the land of Canaan. He had hitherto acted upon the command and direction of God, and therefore was supported by the consciousness of the Divine approval. Now, he relies upon his own wisdom, pursues his own course, and, therefore, is greatly left to his own resources, which prove to be so vain. Besides, the people among whom he wandered were broken up into many small and scattered tribes, against whose violence he had sufficient resources to protect himself. But now, in approaching Egypt, he is coming into a land where there is a compact society, fixed institutions, and a strong government. Abram might well begin to fear lest he might not be able to contend with the difficulties which he foresaw would arise from dwelling in an altogether different condition of society. Civilisation has many perils, as well as advantages for the children of faith.

Escaping one trouble he falls into another. The temptation of Satan in the wilderness was practised upon the patriarch, as it was afterward upon the Messiah Himself—taking advantage of His hunger. Did he forget that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God"? Alas, Egypt was not the land that his covenent God had showed him; and God, his God, could command the stones of Judea, and they would become bread. Now, therefore, as he started upon his own counsel, he is cast upon his own further device. Plainly he is in perplexity, and feels that he is not under the same guardianship, nor travelling by the same Divine warrant as before. How much better to trust in God than to lean to our own understanding. How secure Abram might have been under the Divine guaranty and guidance that all that he needed would be supplied to him in the Land of Promise.—(*Jacobus.*)

There are difficult situations in human life in which the saints of God find that their old nature revives.

Beauty is a snare for them that have it, and them that love it.—(*Hughes.*)

"A fair woman." The term signifies brightness, and refers probably to a fair, clear complexion. Though she was now sixty-five years old, yet this was only as about twenty-five or thirty in our day; and she had not had even the common hardships of a married life; and besides, she was of a character which would shine out in the countenance, full of energy and vivacity. Sarah's beauty was now the ground of Abram's fear among such strangers as the Egyptians, speaking a different tongue, and having a powerful, despotic monarch.—(*Jacobus.*)

In all the changes of our life it is well for us to reflect beforehand what difficulties may await us; not that we may rely upon a carnal policy, but rather upon that grace which will be graduated to our necessity.

Verse 12. Whether the apprehension here expressed was grounded upon anything more than a knowledge of the general evil promptings of our corrupt nature, particularly in a base state of society, is uncertain. This alone would, doubtless, form a sufficient warrant for his fears, and the result shows that they were well founded. Still, he might have had special reasons for such an anticipation, arising from the known character and habits of the people, of which we are ignorant. The opinion expressed by him gives the Egyptians credit for being less scrupulous about murder than adultery, which shows their distorted views of right and wrong, and the fearful influence that unhallowed passions exert upon our moral judgments.—(*Bush.*)

As Abram went down to Egypt of his own accord, and not by the command of God, so he must have recourse of his own devices to deliver him from those dangers into which he is about to plunge himself by his wilfulness.

When once we forsake the counsel of God we are soon convinced of our own weakness.

Abram knew well what he might expect from a people to whom God had not made Himself known.

Cruelty follows hard upon lust.

Fear may overtake believers and weaken faith in times of danger.—(*Hughes.*)

Verse 13. The transgression of Abram was the saying that Sarah was his sister when she was his wife, and the saying was not distinctly false, but rather an evasion, for she was his half-sister. Now we do not say that every evasion is wrong. For example, when an impertinent question is asked respecting family circumstances or religious feelings, it is not necessary that we should tell all. There are cases, therefore, in which we may tell the truth, though not the whole truth. It was even so with our Redeemer, for when asked by the Pharisees why He made Himself the Son of God, He would give them no answer. But Abram's evasion was nothing of this kind, it was a deception. It was not keeping back part of the truth when the questioner has no right to ask; it was false expediency. It was not the selection of the imperfect because the perfect could not be had; but it was the choice between telling the truth and saving his own life. . . . Man must not stop to ask himself which is best, right or wrong.; he *must* do right. It was on this principle that the blessed martyrs of old died for the truth; it was but an evasion that was asked of them, but they felt that there was no comparison between the right and the wrong in the matter. . . . There is but one apology that can be offered for Abraham, and that is the low standard of the age in which he lived; it must be remembered that he was not a Christian.—(*Robertson.*)

Abram may have been tempted to employ this device out of respect to the promise of God, for the fulfilment of which it was necessary that his own life should be preserved. But no man has occasion to be anxious as to how God will accomplish His word. We must in all doubtful cases act upon the clear principles of moral duty, and leave God to find out the way of deliverance.

The grandest heroism is to trust in God. Carnal policy betrays fear and alarm and makes a man a coward.

Abram, as he forsook God's direction, proceeded to doubt his power to spread a table in the wilderness. The history of his children shows that they were prone to the same fault (Num. xi. 14).

It may seem strange that the Scripture contains no express disapprobation of the conduct of Abram. But its manner is to affirm the great principles of moral truth, on suitable occasions, with great clearness and decision; and, in ordinary circumstances simply to record the actions of its characters with faithfulness, leaving it to the reader's intelligence to mark their moral quality. And God's mode of teaching the individual is to implant a moral principle in the heart, which, after many struggles with temptation, will eventually root out all lingering aberrations.—(*Murphy.*)

The path of duty is always straight, lying clear and even before us; when we depart from *that*, we wander into crooked ways which grow worse as we proceed.

The true heroism is to hold fast our integrity, to resist all temptations to save ourselves at the cost of the truth. He who casts himself entirely upon God has no cause to fear. The believer's motto should be, "Jehovah-jireh"—the Lord will provide.

Ver. 14. What we have to fear from the hands of the ungodly we are likely to see verified.

Sarai was sixty-five years of age (Gen. xvii. 17) at the time when Abram describes her as a woman fair to look upon. But we are to remember that beauty does not vanish with middle age; that Sarai's age corresponds with twenty-five or thirty years in modern times, as she was at this time not half the age to which men were then wont to live; that she had no family or other hardship to bring on premature decay, and that the women of Egypt were far from being distinguished for regularity of feature, or freshness of complexion.—(*Murphy.*)

Verse 14. The fears of those who mistrust God, and lean upon their own wisdom, are sometimes realised.

The most precious gifts of God may prove a snare.

Verse 15. This fact is strikingly in accordance with the manner of the Egyptian court, and shows the author's knowledge of Egyptian customs. The formalities were most strict and rigorous. "No slave durst approach, the consecrated priestly person of the Pharaohs, but the court and the royal suite consisted of the sons of the principal priests."—*Diod. Sic.* i. 70. They extolled her beauty that so they might minister to the indulgence of the king, and then their interest in his carnal gratification. And upon such representations of her charms *the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house.* How bitterly Abram must now have bewailed the complications into which he had brought himself. True, his object was so far accomplished that his life was spared; but what a life when bereft now of his wife, and made to think only of the threatened disgrace and ruin which stared her and himself in the face! How must he have grieved to see her led away from him to the harem of the Egyptian monarch, from whose iron will he had no appeal. (*Jacobus.*)

In all ages courtiers have been notorious for ministering to the evil passions of their royal masters. Few men have had the power to withstand the temptations which belong to the possession of unlimited authority.

Of course, Abram could not have been a consenting party in this transaction; and yet it does not appear that the king intended to act, or was considered to act, oppressively in taking away a man's sister without thinking his consent necessary. The passage is illustrated by the privilege which royal personages still exercise in Persia, and other countries of the East, of claiming for their harem the unmarried sister or daughter of any of their subjects. This exercise of authority is rarely, if ever, questioned or resisted, however repugnant it may be to the father or brother. He may regret, as an inevitable misfortune, that his relative ever attracted the royal notice; but, since it has happened, he does not hesitate to admit the right which royalty possesses. When Abimelech, king of Gerar, acted in a similar manner towards Sarah, taking her away from her supposed brother (Gen. xx. 2), it is admitted that he did so "in the integrity of his heart and innocency of his hands," which allows his right to act as he did, if Sarah had been no more than Abraham's sister.—(*Pictorial Bible.*)

Sarah is a type of the Church, and the favour of kings has often proved a snare to her.

Augustine traces, at considerable length, the dispensational fulfilment of this history. In this view Sarah is the Church, or New Covenant body, which, in its way to the land of rest, gets into the world's house for awhile, but is not suffered to be defiled there.—(*Jukes: Types of Genesis.*)

Verse 16. There are times when our sins and faults seem to be rewarded by increased worldly prosperity. But there abides the consciousness of some deep loss for which the world can give us no compensation. Abram's possessions were increased, but he loses that which to him was more precious than wealth.

When Abram arrived there, Egypt was under the rule of the shepherd kings, whose government had its capital in the Delta, or northerly portion, where he entered. These presents are such as one pastoral chief would present to another. It is plain that only such presents must have been made to Abram as were particularly valuable to him as a nomad. Mules and camels appear on the ancient monuments of Egypt. But all these princely gifts could not appease the honest grief of such an one as Abram for the shameful removal from him of his beloved Sarah. And the presents he durst not refuse lest he perish.—(*Jacobus.*)

In this time of trial Abram must have reflected upon the evil which he had done by his prevarication. We may suppose that this was for him a time of repentance and prayer, that God would interpose to deliver him.

There are times when the kindness and good-will of the world may become a source of great perplexity to the Church.

Verse 17. God is faithful to His elect, and interposes to rescue them, even from the evils which they bring upon themselves.

Men who oppress and afflict the Church shall at length be overtaken by Divine justice. God breaks the rod by which He chastises His elect.

The judgments of God are often sent beforehand, to prevent further sin. Blessed is he who learns their solemn lesson and intent before it is too late.

The mode of the Divine interference is suited to have the desired effect on the parties concerned. As Pharaoh is punished we conclude that he was guilty in the eye of Heaven in this matter. He committed a breach of hospitality by invading the private abode of the stranger. He further infringed the law of equity between man and man in the most tender point. A deed of ruthless self-will, also, is often rendered more heinous by a blameable inattention to the character or position of him who is wronged. So it was with Pharaoh. Abram was a man of blameless life and inoffensive manners. He was, moreover, the chosen and special servant of the most High God. Pharaoh, however, does not condescend to inquire who the stranger is whom he is about to wrong; and is thus unwittingly involved in an aggravated crime. But the hand of the Almighty brings even tyrants to their senses.—(*Murphy.*)

The professors of the true faith may sometimes commit folly, and act unworthy of their calling, yet will God teach men to respect them.

Though Abram was far from his home and in great perplexity, God was still caring for him and working out his deliverance.

And his house. They who minister to the sin of others are involved in the same condemnation and exposed to the same judgments. God has a controversy with the families of the wicked.

Kings and their people have often been reproved and punished for their treatment of the Church of God. (Psa. cv. 12-14.)

Verse 18. God had reproved Pharaoh, and now Pharaoh reproves Abram. It is a sad thing that saints should do that for which they should justly fall under the reproof of the wicked. (*Trapp.*)

Pharaoh throws the blame entirely upon Abram, and forgets how much he himself had done to deserve the punishment that fell upon him. We may think ourselves merely the victims of others' sins, but when Divine judgments touch us, we may be sure that there is some evil in ourselves which needs correction.

Even a saint of God, when he is worthy of blame, may receive direction and reproof from the children of this world. The position may be humiliating, yet the lesson must not be despised on account of the quarter whence it comes. Heathen morality has some valuable teaching which would put to shame many who profess the true religion.

The very manner of the deliverance is a rebuke to Abram himself. The man of whom he thought so ill has fairly the advantage of him, both in reproving and in requiting him. The dignified remonstrance of Pharaoh, speaking as one wronged—and in this particular instance, whatever might be his own sin, he was wronged, by the distrust which had been felt and the deceit which had been practised—is fitted deeply to humble the patriarch. And when he saw the king so reasonable now—nay, when he even learned that if he had been told the truth at first he would have been as reasonable then—well might the patriarch be ashamed of his unnecessary and unprofitable falsehood, his weak and well-nigh fatal act of unbelief. Had he trusted God and dealt justly by Pharaoh at the beginning, it might have fared better both with him and with Sarai. An honest testimony might have told even upon one whom they regarded as beyond the reach of truth and righteousness. Still, as it was, God made the fall of His servant an occasion of good. He glorified Himself in the eyes of Pharaoh and his court.—(*Candlish.*)

Verse 19. The plagues of God lead some worldly men to consider the cause wherefore they are sent.

Words are not mere sounds which die away and are forgotten; they often live in the actions of others, to save or to destroy.

It is sad when the man of the world has to reprove the saint of God for his lack of open honesty and truth. Many professing Christians might be put to shame by the purer morality of those who are outside.

There are some sins from which the children of this world, who are not wholly abandoned to vice, shrink as from something horrible, the very possibility of which in their own case alarms them.

The justice of restitution, when the wrong is felt and known, is apparent to those who follow the light of natural religion.

The judgments of God upon Pharaoh quickened his conscience so that it answered to the eternal law of right.

The words, "So might I," etc., might also be rendered, *And I took her to me to wife.* This Pharaoh did, although, as we may fairly supply from the subsequent account (compare ver. 17 with ch. xx. 6) that he was providentially withheld from consummating his marriage with her.—(*Alford.*)

Verse 20. Pharaoh now gives commandment to his men—his servants—officials who could be charged with this business. *And they sent him away.* The Septuagint reads, *to send him away*—as though this was what the men were commanded to do—to send forth Abram and his household from the country. The term implies an honourable escort, for his safe departure from Egypt with *all that he had*—cattle, goods, etc. (ver. 16).—(*Jacobus.*)

Abram's experience in Egypt was—1. A means of reproving him for his sins. He left, without sufficient deliberation, the land which God had showed him. He showed want of confidence in the provisions of God in the time of distress, and resorted to a worldly policy to aid him in the time of perplexity. His experience was—2. A strange discipline, by which he was brought back to the Land of Promise. Through such painful and weary paths does God often bring His people to the land of their inheritance.

Thus was Abram delivered; thus even now are individuals freed; thus shall the poor captive Church escape at last. The world will not have us among them because our principles judge them, and God will not have us there. In this one thing God and the world agree. Both, at last, say to us, "Behold thy wife; take her and go thy way."—(*Jukes: Types of Genesis.*)

CHAPTER XIII.

Critical Notes.—1. Went up out of Egypt] In the language of the Jew the direction to erusalem from every quarter was upwards; besides, Egypt was a low-lying country, and the traveller would have to ascend on his way to the hilly country of Canaan.—**Into the south]** *Heb. Towards the south.* Not the south of Egypt, but the southern region of Palestine. A certain part of the country was called "the south" before the times of the Patriarchs. The LXX. has *εις την ερημον, into the desert;* which conveys the same meaning, for Judea was bounded on the south by the desert region of Idumea.—**3. And he went on his journey]** *Heb. According to his removings.* He proceeded after the manner of a nomad, striking his tent frequently and performing his journey by stations.—**Between Bethel and Hai]** "Stanley well describes this point as a conspicuous hill, its topmost summit resting on the rocky slopes below, and distinguished by its olive groves, offering a natural base for the altar, and a fitting shade for the tent of the patriarch" (*Jacobus*).—**Called on the name of the Lord]** This implies more than an ordinary prayer: he re-established public worship.—**5. Tents]** Including their occupants, as wives, children, and domestics. Thus we have in 1 Chron. iv. 41: "Smote their tents, *i.e.*, those who occupied them."—**6. And the land was not able to bear them]** The LXX. has, *did not contain them to dwell together.* Their flocks and herds had grown too numerous to find pasture there. An inability, moreover, of a moral kind, may be implied.—**7. The Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the land]** The Perizzites are not mentioned in the table of nations, Chapter x. Their origin is obscure. The Canaanites were the original occupants of the soil.—**8. For we are brethren]** Heb. *Men, brethren.* The same phrase is used (Acts xv. 13, and xxiii. 1) when referring to national brotherhood. Abram was both brother-in-law and uncle to Lot; they were therefore kinsmen. They were also brethren in the unity of religious faith.—**10. Jordan]** The first reference to this river—the only one in the country which flows through the entire summer.—**Plain of Jordan]** Lit. *the circle of Jordan*—the environs. "He saw not indeed the tropical fertility and copious streams along its course. But he knew of its fame as the garden of Eden, as of the valley of the Nile. No crust of salt, no volcanic convulsions had as yet blasted its verdure, or touched the secure civilisation of the early Phœnician settlements which had struck root within its deep abyss" (*Stanley*).—**Before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah]** The face of the country was altered by the destruction of these cities.—**Garden of the Lord]** Heb. *Garden of Jehovah, i.e.,* Eden.—**Like the land of Egypt as thou comest unto Zoar]** Houbigant translates, "Before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, it was all, as thou goest to Zoar, well watered, even as the garden of the Lord, and as the land of Egypt." The name of the city at this time was Bela, and was called Zoar by anticipation.—**11. Journeyed east]** By this we might suppose that he took the "right hand," according to the offer (ver. 9); but the Hebrews, in naming the points of the compass, supposed the face to be turned towards sunrising; and the *right* hand would be the south.—**And they separated themselves one from the other]** Heb. *A man from his brother.*—**12. Land of Canaan]** That portion of Palestine between the Jordan and the Mediterranean sea, excluding the valley of the Jordan.—**Pitched his tent toward Sodom]** He advanced towards it till he came near, but was probably prevented from entering by the well-known character of its inhabitants.—**13. Wicked sinners before the Lord exceedingly]** *Onkelos* reads, "But the men of Sodom were unrighteous with their riches, and most vile in their bodies before the Lord exceedingly."—**15. To thee will I give it, and to thy seed]** Perhaps a better rendering would be, "To thee will I give it, *even* to thy seed." The Heb. particle translated "and" has frequently the signification of "even." 1 Chron. xxi. 12: "The Lord's sword, *and* the pestilence," *i.e., even* the pestilence. It is certain that the promise was never fulfilled to Abram personally.—**18. Plain of Mamre]** Heb. word denotes a tree or grove. Mamre is also a personal name (Gen. xiv. 13)—a person described as an Amorite.—**Which is in Hebron]** The first mention of this name. It is one of the most ancient cities in the world. In Numb. xiii. 22 it is said to have been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt. The ancient name was Kirjath-Arba. Here Sarah and Abraham died.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–4.

THE BELIEVER LEARNING FROM HIS GREAT ENEMY.

It is an old saying that "It is lawful to learn from an enemy." We may strive to overcome him, to protect ourselves with all care, and to maintain our cause. Still he may teach us many lessons. We may refuse to unite with him, but we cannot help being instructed. The world is the great enemy of the believer, and Egypt was to Abram the representative of all worldliness. Abram was faith, Egypt was carnality. The patriarch had sojourned in the world's kingdom, and had learned those solemn lessons which, as it too often happens, only a bitter experience can teach. He returned a sadder, but a wiser man. By the strength of Divine grace the believer may recover from the effects of the danger to which he had exposed himself by too close an alliance with the world. Even his faults and failings may result in spiritual gain. The lessons of wisdom may be dearly bought, still they are the secured possessions of the soul. The believer who has fallen into the world's snares, or comes dangerously near to them, learns—

I. That it is not safe to leave the paths marked out by Divine Providence. While Abram dwelt in Canaan, in the land which God had promised to give him, he was in the way of duty and of Providence, and was therefore safe. Calamity drove him to seek refuge in Egypt. He consulted his own safety, leaned to his own understanding, instead of seeking to know what was the Divine will. He ought to have trusted in Providence, and kept within the area of the promise. It is a dangerous experiment to leave the paths of Providence for any advantages the world may offer. 1. *While we are in the path of Providence we may expect Divine direction.* God honours the law of life which He has laid down for man by protecting and strengthening him while he observes it. There are special promises of grace to a sincere and exact obedience. When the sense of duty is so strong that we are regardless of any worldly consequences to ourselves, God will guide us and find a way to bring us out of the evil. To submit to be ruled absolutely by the will of God is meekness, which is the true conquering principle. They only have the true victory over all that is really evil, who acknowledge God in all their ways. 2. *When we leave the paths of Providence we are thrown upon the resources of our own wisdom and strength, and can only expect failure.* The world is too powerful and cunning an enemy for the believer to encounter by any might and skill of his own. He who would conquer must not engage in a private expedition on his own charges, but must have all the strength of the kingdom of God lawfully engaged on his side. He must enter the conflict as one of the loyal and obedient hosts of God. The believer, himself redeemed from the world, can never be kept above that world but by the strength of a Divine power. The grace of God is not a sudden impulse which suffices once for all, but a source of perpetual strength. When we cease to receive from *that*, the power of evil gains upon us and we are in spiritual danger. 3. *Every step we take from the paths of Providence only increases the difficulty of returning.* Though Abram followed his own will in going down to Egypt, he still retained his hold upon God. His heart was set upon obedience, and he only erred in not waiting for a clear sense of the Divine guidance. Though his fault was not grievous, it brought him into an entanglement with the world from which he could only extricate himself with difficulty. The danger continually increased, and the moral situation to which he had brought himself was perplexing. When once we leave the clear paths of duty which the will of God points out, our moral danger increases, and the difficulty of returning. Moral deviation generates a fearfully increasing distance from the good we have left. Another lesson which the believer may learn from his enemy is—

II. That the friendship of the world involves deep spiritual loss. Abram's strong faith and firm principle of obedience could not save him from danger when exposed to the influences of the world, during his sojourn in Egypt. The world is an enemy that must be *always* regarded as such. There must be no pause in our spiritual warfare, no friendly overtures under the protection of a truce. The believer who courts friendship with the world, though he proceeds with much caution and firm purpose of integrity, is sure to suffer spiritual loss. Thus, in the case of Abram—1. *The delicacy of the moral principle was injured.*

by his prevarication Abram had exposed his wife to danger and himself to an irreparable loss. He saw that wealth, power, and rank were arrayed against him, and he sought his own safety by a *false expediency*. The step was then easy to *deceit*, and to the dangerous verge of absolute falsehood. He had learned this from the world, which had taught him to swerve from his better purpose, to be otherwise than his better self. It is a great calamity when the delicacy of conscience is injured. Fresh sin becomes easier, and even doubtful things deepen into the dark colours of evil. Above all, it is dangerous to depart from *truth*—to rest our moral being in any degree upon an unreality. The contagion of that which is false rapidly corrupts our whole moral nature. 2. *There was actual spiritual loss.* When Abram turned aside from the truth and selfishly sought his own ends, the sense of the Divine presence must have been less clear. The faith in Providence to protect and guide him in the time of danger must have been less strong. The fervour of his first dedication to God must have greatly abated. The whole character was weakened. At first he had faith so strong that he could leave all at God's command and venture upon an unknown and untried journey. He was satisfied with light for one step at a time, and trusted God for the future. Now he refuses to tell the whole truth, to take the consequences, and to trust in God to find the way of deliverance. Any loss of faith, of the clear insight of conscience, of the comforting and supporting sense of the Divine presence, is to be deplored. We cannot indulge in friendship with the world without some injury, and there is the danger of total loss. This is the dark side of the picture, but there is a way of escape. We may, through the grace of God, repair the losses we have sustained. The world teaches us some sad lessons, yet hereby we learn wisdom.

III. That the soul's safety is best secured by revisiting, in loving memory, the scenes where God was first felt and known. "And he went on his journey from the south, even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai" (verse 3). He returned to the Land of Promise, where he could be assured of God's protection and His grace. There God had blessed him, there he experienced the first fervours of faith, the first sensations and stirrings of a new life. Thus, when the world has injured our faith or hope in God, or tempted us to evil, our way of return is marked out for us. We have to "do our first works," and to "remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." The believer, when his soul has been injured by the world, derives comfort and encouragement from the past—from revisiting the scenes where God was first felt and known. 1. *He is aided by remembering the strength and fervour of his early faith and love.* When God first appears to the soul, and faith and love are awakened, we feel strong for duty, and all difficulties seem to vanish. Through the impulse of our first devotion we continue for a season loving and serving with an ardent mind. But when we grow cold, or the world has gained an advantage over us in an unguarded hour, we may revive our languishing graces by the thought of what we once were, and still may be, if we return to our first love. The torch of an almost expiring faith and devotion may be rekindled at the altar where we were first consecrated to God. We can thus take our stand upon a *fact* in our spiritual history, and believe that God is able to repeat His former kindness. 2. *Memory may become a means of grace.* It is well for us to look backwards, as well as forwards by the anticipations of hope. What God has done for us in the past is a pledge of what He will do in the future, if we continue faithful to His grace. We may use memory to encourage hope. "Because Thou hast been my help; therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice." Let us imitate Abram, who returned to the sweet memorial places where he first met God. There we *know* that we shall have succour and deliverance.

IV. There must be a fresh consecration to God. Abram went at once to Bethel, where at the beginning he had pitched his tent, and built an altar to God. There he "called on the name of the Lord." This implies a fresh consecration of himself, and points out the method by which we may recover our spiritual loss. Such a fresh consecration is necessary, for *there are no other channels of spiritual blessing, but those by which it first flowed to us.* There is no new way of restoration. We must come back to Him who first gave us our faith and made reconciliation. This renewed consecration of ourselves to God involves—1. *The acknowledgment of our sin.* It was sin that made, at first, our reconciliation with God necessary, and fresh sin renews the obligation to seek His face. 2. *The conviction that propitiation is necessary to obtain the favour of God.* Repentance for the sinful past is not sufficient; for it often fails to repair the evils that we have brought upon ourselves. There is still a dread behind that we are answerable for our sins to One whom we have offended. Such has been the universal feeling of mankind, who have added *sacrifices* to their repentance. They have felt that God must be propitiated—that they must seek His favour by some appointed way of mercy. We need an altar and a sacrifice. Some expedient is necessary to restore the alienated heart of man back to God. We confess by offering sacrifice that in strict justice we deserve the penalty, yet that Divine mercy has a way of escape for us so that we may see salvation. 3. *The open profession of our faith.* "Abram called *on the name of the Lord.* He who knows the salvation of God must confess Him before men. The believer cannot live to himself; he must stand forth as an example to others, a witness for God in the world. God can be seen but dimly in His works. He is most of all manifested in His saints. By their possession of truth and righteousness they reflect His intellectual and moral image. It is necessary that God should be represented to the world by good men. To call upon the name of the Lord is to acknowledge our relation to Him, and the duties thence arising; that His benefits demand recognition and praise. When we make an open profession of our faith before men we glorify God, we revive and keep in full vigour the sense of our adoption, and feel that in all our wanderings we are still God's children and His witnesses in the world.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. When the course of God's Providence opens up a way of escape from the scenes of temptation and trial, our duty is to follow in it.

We are safe only when we leave the land of carnality and dwell in the land of promise.

Unreality and deceit are some of the characteristic marks of the world, and the children of faith do not always escape their infection.

In Egypt the *Church*—the chosen people—was introduced to the *world.* Egypt was to Abram, to the Jewish people also, to the whole course of the Old Testament, what the world, with all its interests and pursuits and enjoyments, is to us. But while Egypt, with its pride of wealth and art and power, its temples and pyramids, is almost forgotten, the name of the shepherd patriarch lives. Egypt is a type of the world-kingdom, abounding in wealth and power, offering temptations to a mere carnal sense. But Abram had encountered its worldliness and pride, and had been in danger of losing his personal and domestic peace, and was glad, doubtless, to escape from the land, and yet be once more within the boundaries of the Land of Promise.—(*Jacobus.*)

Abram's deliverance from Egypt is a prophecy of the final deliverance of God's people from this present evil world.

Lot accompanied Abram on his journeys as joined to him by the tie of natural relationship, and it may be also that the association contributed to his prosperity; but the event will tell how he has separate interests and is governed by a prevailing selfishness of nature.

Verse 2. We have an account of the return of Abram from the land of Egypt rich. It has been observed that the blessedness of the Old Testament is prosperity, while that of the New Testament is affliction. Let not men say from this that the law of God is altered; it is we who have altered in conceptions of things. There was a time when men fancied that afflictions were proofs of God's anger, but the revelation of God in Christ has since manifested to us the blessedness of affliction; for it is the cross that God bestows as His highest reward on all His chosen ones.—(*Robertson.*)

Riches, if rightly used, do not hinder men from going after God.

Verse 3. The believer cannot find his true rest where God is not enjoyed.

Abram moves to Bethel, where he had known God at the first. Thus the heart obeys the superior attraction. The magnetic needle may be disturbed by some force from its position, but when the constraint is removed it trembles towards the pole. In the midst of all his wanderings the heart of the patriarch pointed true.

Bethel: 1. The scene of the manifestation of God. 2. The birthplace of a new spiritual life. 3. The home of the most precious memories. 4. The earthly counterpart of heaven.

In things spiritual, to come back to our first love is true wisdom.

With his heart set, not upon his earthly possessions but upon his heavenly inheritance, he measured his steps to the place where he might "compass God's altar," and renew those delightful experiences which still dwelt upon his memory. It is well known with what exquisite emotions we re-visit, after a long absence, the scenes with which we were familiar in childhood and youth. The sight of the well-remembered places and objects calls up a thousand interesting associations, and our past existence seems for a time to be renewed to us. But to the pious heart how much more delightful and exhilarating is the view of scenes where we have experienced striking instances of providential kindness, where we have received token of the Divine favour, where we have held communion with God, and been refreshed with the manifestations of His love. Bethel was a place thus endeared by association to Abram, and it is only the heart that is a stranger to such feelings that will find any difficulty in accounting for his anxiety to tread again its pleasant precincts, and breathe the air which was shed around it.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 4. Abram returns to the place of his altar in Bethel. In like manner Christian settlements, towns, and villages, cluster around their churches. —(*Lange.*)

Tent and altar were now in his mind as he had enjoyed them at first. We remember our sweet home and our sweet church after we have roamed in a land of exile. We yearn to get back to where we have enjoyed the dear circle of our family, and that of our Christian brethren—where we have lived, and where we have worshipped. Because it was *Bethel*, he loved it, even as the *house of God* (Ps. lxxxiv. 1, 2). —(*Jacobus.*)

Coming to the altar, and calling upon the name of the Lord, regard—I. Public religion. 1. The witness to, and confession of God before men. 2. The missionary element. By such an action Abram was spreading the knowledge of God amongst men. True religion must be aggressive and make war upon the enemy's camp. The patriarch's office was to generate faith in others. II. Private religion. 1. Confessions of sin. God cannot be approached directly, but by some way of mediation. This implies that man has sinned, and has no longer access to God except by a way of mercy which God Himself appoints. 2. Supplication for forgiveness. The altar implies that God is offended by the sin of man, and, therefore, His mercy must be sought. 3. The necessity of sacrifice to propitiate the Divine favour. The stroke of justice must fall upon the sinner's substitute. The life sacrificed upon the altar is accepted instead of that of the suppliant. Our altar is the cross. 4. The revival of the spirit of adoption. Abram had lost that clear sense of the Divine acceptance which he once enjoyed, and now he seeks to recover it by returning to the place where God at a former time met him in mercy.

Every time we come to God, even though we may have to do so in great penitence and humiliation, we renew our strength.

He who first gave us our spiritual life is necessary afterwards to sustain it.

The soul of the believer has its true home in the house of God, where His glory is manifested. By the strength and beauty of the Divine presence he enjoys there his own home, and the whole scene of his life becomes consecrated.

The manner in which "the place of the altar" is mentioned, seems to intimate that he chose to go thither, in preference to another place, on this account. It is very natural that he should do so; for the places where we have called on the name of the Lord, and enjoyed communion with Him, are, by association, endeared to us above all others. There Abram again called on the name of the Lord; and the present exercises of grace, we may suppose, were aided by a remembrance of the past. It is an important rule in choosing our habitations, to have an eye to the place of the altar. If Lot had acted on this principle, he would not have done as is here related of him.—(*Fuller*.)

ABRAM'S JOURNEY TO THE PLACE OF THE ALTAR.

"The steps of a good man," says the Psalmist, "are ordered by the Lord, and He delighteth in his way." The truth of this has never been disputed in the Church, and proofs of the regard which God entertains to His devoted children may be derived from all parts of Scripture, which unite to prove that the eye and hand of an overruling Providence have been constantly engaged on their behalf. The history of Abram shows the *individual* attention which God bestows towards His faithful servants. Their names are held in imperishable memorial, their interests are perpetually consulted, nothing which concerns them is too minute to escape the Divine notice—their birthplace, their journeyings, their crosses, their comforts, their enemies, their friends. The great empires of the world, and the names of their rulers and disturbers, are seldom mentioned but in connection with the Church. Cain's generation is numbered in haste, but the generations of the godly are carefully recorded. Seth's posterity are written in a large scroll and more legible hand, with the number of the years in which they lived, which in the case of Cain's posterity is not noticed. God remembers Noah's cattle as well as his sons. Jacob's flocks and herds are distinctly noted; and here all that concerns Abram is deemed worthy of attention—his journeyings, his companions, his possessions, the place where his tent was fixed, the circumstances which led to the erection of his altar, and the fact of his offering his customary devotions. We notice—

I. His love to the Land of Promise, which all the attractions of Egypt could not extinguish or overpower. Egypt was at this time the most important country in the world, the resort of all nations. From the earliest times it was called the world's great granary, a country so fair and fertile, that the Egyptians boasted that they could *feed all men and feast all the gods.* It is noticed, too, that Abram was very *rich*, and had probably great increase of his wealth in

Egypt, which was a greater temptation to him to protract his stay. But Egypt, with all her plenty and pleasure, had not stolen away his heart from the Promised Land. Neither had he so laden himself with thick clay, as that he was disinclined to strike his tent and pursue his journey, but he went from strength to strength. All this was done by faith. Let us imitate his great example. In the midst of all we enjoy remember how much more we have in hope. In the midst of peace, prosperity, honours, and enjoyments, let us still consider that we are pilgrims, and while we thankfully accept the favours showed us in a strange country, let us not forget our better home. A Land of Promise contents Abram; he leaves the *possession* to his posterity. Abram went up from Egypt, so there should be daily an ascension of our minds to the better country above. Abram took all he had; the Christian is not content to go to heaven alone. Happy it is to journey to heaven when accompanied by those we love.

II. His veneration for the place where God first appeared to him. He went on his journey to Bethel. Many a weary step he took till he came to his old altar. He went to sanctify that good he had got in Egypt, to give God thanks for it and to consecrate it to Him. Enemies may part us and our tents, but not us and our God. The remembrance of the sweet communion and intercourse he had with God at that place was delightful and reviving to his mind. It was there God had appeared to him when he first set his foot in the land of Canaan, and the recollection appears to have been hallowed to him as it was to Jacob in after times. It was his first special time of dedication to God. It was there he built his first altar—there he received his first promise—there he offered his first prayer—there he recorded his first vow. The review of the same was eminently satisfactory and grateful to his mind. Twice it is mentioned, "the place where his tent had been," "the place of the altar." There may be in the journey of life many inviting scenes, many fertile spots, but there is no place like the *place of the altar*. From this spot nothing that Egypt and the intermediate countries could offer was able to divert Abram. He came back prosperous, but his heart was unchanged. Time is apt to wear out the sense of mercies. Many in their travels leave religion behind them.

III. His concern wherever he was to erect his altar. Wherever we go we must take our religion with us. 1. *As a public profession.* 2. *As keeping up family religion.* Wherever he had a tent God had an altar.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 5–9.

STRIFE BETWEEN BRETHREN.

Such is the condition of human nature, even under the culture of religious thought and feeling, that few communities can exist long without some causes of dispute. Strife arose in this little society of religious men, consisting of Abram and Lot. The light of God as it falls upon human souls becomes tinged with their own earthliness. Hence even in churches founded by the Apostles disputes and divisions have arisen. The perfect gift of the grace of God is maimed in its effects by the imperfection of man. Here, in the verses before us, we have the first draft of a Church in a short space disfigured by human failings. Men who ought to have lived as brethren, with common interests and pursuits, were obliged to part for the sake of maintaining peace. The history of Churches is but a sad comment upon the features of this incident. Let us consider such strife :—

I. As to the causes of it. We find that Lot, by his association with Abram, had, like him, grown rich (ver. 5). Hence one of the causes of strife between brethren is—1. *Worldly prosperity.* "The land was not able to bear them that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together" (ver. 6). As long as they had little, or but moderate wealth, they could live together in peace. They were seized by no lust of ambition or display, there was no prize to be snatched at, and to cause a quarrel, their dependants could agree together as the servants of one family. But as riches increase they become unwieldy, and more difficult to be managed. Complications arise unknown to humbler days, when wants were few and habits simple. It has often happened that friends have lived together in harmony till one of them has been made rich; then disputes have arisen, there is a coldness between them, and at length complete separation. The tendency of great possessions is to nourish the natural covetousness of the human heart, which grows by what it feeds on. It is a sad fact that with increase of wealth the heart does not always enlarge with noble and kind emotions. Men become proud, harsh, overbearing, selfish, and suspicious of the advances of their friends. Riches are often the apple of discord. Another cause of strife is—2. *The mean ambition of the ignoble souls associated with us.* It was between "the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle" that the strife at first arose which so soon spread to their masters. The land was too narrow for them when their flocks had increased, and they were tempted to encroach upon each other's territories. Strife often begins with the *servants* of men who are in great places, power, or wealth. A certain meanness of spirit is almost inseparable from a state of servitude. Underlings can seldom take large views; their passions are easily aroused, and they soon pick an occasion of quarrel. They are the victims of low ambition. Their supreme object in life is devotion to a chief, or courting the favour of their master; and for this they will contend with fierce passions, and to the sacrifice of peace and morality. Such disputes often alienate families and their chiefs. Another cause is—3. *The want of the obliging nature.* Men, especially those who are mean-spirited and of narrow views, are slow to yield what they consider as their rights. They insist upon them however much others may be injured by such severity, or however ridiculous or unreasonable such conduct must of necessity be in some cases. There is a certain gracious spirit and behaviour by which men acquire that kind of gliding movement so as to pass through life with little friction. What is called politeness or gentility in common speech, to some extent accomplishes this. But the Christian religion alone can produce this spirit in all its reality and perfection.

II. As to the evils of it. Though strife often arises from a small occasion, yet it may grow to a great evil. A little matter may kindle a spark that will increase till it becomes a devouring fire. The wise man has said that "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water." A slight fissure in the embankment through which a little water flows, gradually makes a wider rent until the floods at length burst through and spread destruction all around. Strife tends more and more to separate men from one another, to divide interests which ought to be united. Among the many evils of strife between brethren are the following: 1. *It destroys the sacred feeling of kinship.* Abram and Lot belonged to the same family, and each might naturally look to the other for every office of kindness. They ought to have been able to dwell together in harmony. Strife arises between their servants, and though this was not sufficient to alienate the masters, yet it must do so in the end unless they separated They could no longer dwell close together as brethren. The true ideal of human society is that all men should be able to dwell together as belonging to one kin —as members of one great family. The word *kind* comes from *kin*, as pointing out that disposition which should be maintained by those who are really members of the same family. Strife destroys this feeling of a common brotherhood. 2. *It exposes true religion to contempt.* When strife exists between those who are not only members of the same family, but also of the household of God, the evils which arise are more than personal. They affect injuriously the interests of the Church itself. Here we read that "the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the land." The heathen around were witnesses to the strife, and they would derive an unfavourable impression of the religion of the men who exhibited such base passions. They could hardly consider that such a religion was superior to their own. To embrace the true religion is to join a brotherhood, to become naturalised, as it were, into a holy nation; and any strife or disorder arising must tend to bring that religion into contempt. Few men have penetration enough to judge principles by their tendencies, and not by their perversions. They estimate religion by the conduct of its professors. Thus the way of truth comes to be evil spoken of. The men of the world are spectators of the Church. If Christianity had not been hindered by the conduct of its professors, it might, at this hour of history, have overspread the whole world. 3. *It brings spiritual loss to individuals.* When brethren of the same household of faith fall to strife there must be some spiritual loss. Some may have sufficient strength of principle to recover; others may be permanently injured. Lot was deprived of the benefit of Abram's example and influence by his separation from him. As Lot had not sufficient strength of character to overcome his natural selfishness, the loss of the influence of such a religious life upon him was, as the event proved, most serious. Strife and envy tend to bring about every evil work.

III. As to the remedies of it. There are remedies for the moral evils of the world, and through the grace of God these are rendered effectual towards producing perfection of character. The mode of Abram's dealing with strife shows us how we may overcome this evil. As a remedy for strife, therefore, we may propose—1. *The recognition of the obligations of brotherhood.* "Let there be no strife," said the Father of the Faithful, "for we be brethren." This ought to have put a restraint at once upon such unruly passions. If we could only preserve a clear recognition of the fact of our common brotherhood, especially as heirs of the same heritage of faith and hope, we could never allow ourselves to engage in strife. The true atmosphere, the very life of the family, is peace. The thought that "we are brethren" ought to put an end to all disputes. 2. *The yielding temper.* In religion this would be called the spirit of meekness, which is a disposition to yield what is a right and privilege, and even to submit to be wronged rather than that another should be injured. As he was the principal, Abraham had the right to choose his part of the country first, but he yields to Lot. He gives up his own privilege rather than disturb religious peace. Thus we may learn not to insist upon our rights when by doing so greater evils than any personal loss to ourselves must arise. Jesus, because He was the Son of God, might have claimed exemption from the payment of the half-shekel tax, levied in very deed for the support of worship rendered to Himself; yet rather than give offence He wrought a miracle to obtain the necessary sum (Matt. xvii. 24–27). The meek have the true victory; they inherit the earth. "The heavenly principle of forbearance evidently holds the supremacy in Abram's breast. He walks in the moral atmosphere of the Sermon on the Mount" (*Murphy*). 3. *Confidence in the promise of God that we shall suffer no real loss by obedience to His command.* To be devoted to the good of others, to be meek and humble-minded, is in accordance with the will of God. Whatever temporary evils may arise, we can suffer no real loss by following God's command. Abram was confident that his covenant God would support him and make good the promise of His blessing. Let his kinsman choose the best of the land, and be more prosperous in this world's goods, yet for himself it sufficed that he had the better portion, and the comfort and peace arising from obedience and the sense of an interest in the everlasting covenant.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 5. Those who cast in their lot with the friends of God are often blessed for their sakes. The very shadow of the Church of God falling upon men has a healing influence. The righteous wish to all prosperity in the name of the Lord.

Prosperity is a curse to some. In Lot's case it may have increased that thirst for gain which fed his selfishness, and ended in the injury of his spiritual character.

Verse 6. It was in a *literal sense* true that the land could not bear them, for their riches—consisting chiefly of cattle—had grown so great. But there may have been a *moral inability*, arising from the perverse disposition and unkindness of their servants, or it may be from something in the character of Lot that would eventually have led to a rupture.

Probably their cattle and flocks now numbered too many to be accommodated by the pasturage. The country was an open common. It could not be held by any title. Every one drove his cattle where he could find the best grazing for them. This absence of law to define and protect real estates would naturally open the way for jealousy and strife, and the strong would have an advantage over the weak.—(*Jacobus.*)

It is a pity that those whom grace unites, and who are fellow-heirs of eternal life, should be parted by the lumber of this world. Yet, so it is. A clash of worldly interests has often separated chief friends, and been the occasion of a much greater loss than the greatest earthly fulness has been able to compensate. It is not thus with the riches of grace or of glory; the more we have of them the closer it unites us.—(*Fuller.*)

We saw in creation a separating process before a perfecting one; we shall see it again and again in man's development. Abram separated from Ur, and from Terah, and from Egypt, has further to be separated from Lot also before he can be perfected; for it is only "after that Lot was separated from him that the Lord said unto him, Lift up now thine eyes, for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it."—(*Jukes: Types of Genesis.*)

Verse 7. This quarrel arose partly from disobligingness of disposition. Here we find the Christian community resembling the Jewish. There is a constant strife now among servants as to whose duty it is to do certain things, arising from the same indisposition to oblige one another. Then observe how by degrees Lot and Abram are drawn into the quarrel, and how again we find human nature the same in all ages. The bitterness between child and child, between husband and wife, are often to be referred back to the bitterness between domestic servants. Again, the scandal of this disagreement passed on through the land; the Canaanite and the Perizzite heard of it. Here is a lesson both for Christian masters and servants. Our very doors and walls are not sufficient to guard domestic secrecy; if there has been a scandal in a place, that scandal is sure to be heard. And if Christian men and women listen to the gossip of their servants, with whom does the guilt lie? On the other hand, servants who wish to be servants not after the flesh but after the spirit—with good-will doing service as to the Lord and not unto men—should recollect that they are admitted into secrets which they must know, but that there is an honour which should bind their tongue. They are trusted; they should let that trust be kept sacred for the Lord.—(*Robertson.*)

The fortunes of Abram and Lot become affected by the strifes of their servants. It is difficult even for the best of men to keep clear of all consequences arising from the evils of others.

Abram and Lot became rich in cattle and herds; but as long as they dwelt in one compact community this involved scarcity of herbage. Thus riches often increase in one direction while they diminish in another. How often it happens that a man increases in wealth, and grows poorer in moral principle, in human kindness, and in spiritual religion!

The germinal divisions of masters ofttimes reveal themselves clearly in the strifes of their servants and dependents. Even the wives are often in open hostility while their husbands are still at peace. Abram teaches us how to observe these symptoms in the right way. His proposal to separate arises from his love of peace, not from any selfish regard to his own interests. —*(Lange.)*

These two godly men could not dwell together because of the strifes of their servants. The outward unity of their families was destroyed, though their inward unity might still be preserved. How often does God's kingdom suffer from the strifes of His servants! The Church, rent by divisions, and distracted by endless controversies, becomes a stumbling-block to unbelievers, and a sorrowful regret to those who love her most.

The strife here recorded was watched by unfriendly eyes. This ought to have prevented the evils of dissension, yet still they broke forth; so difficult it is to restrain the stormy passions of men. It is sad to reflect that the scandal which must arise from the exhibition of violence and wrong on the part of professors of religion has not always acted as a check upon their conduct.

The godly in every land are exposed to the observation of ill-disposed neighbours.

The evils of passion and strife must be accepted as one of the sad facts of our poor human nature. Such is our condition since the Fall, that this terrible fatality lies upon us. Even in the Church itself it "must needs be that offences come." There is a necessity for these things. The corruption of our spiritual nature by sin has laid this destiny upon us.

In all ages enemies of the Church are ever on the watch to discover, publish, and triumph over the feuds and jealousies that may arise between its members. This consideration alone should quench the unholy flame of divisions among brethren.—*(Bush.)*

Verse 8. True religion is of a practical nature, and adapts itself with a godly prudence to the exigencies of life. By a determination of character, and the assertion of a great fact, and consequent principle of duty, Abram was able to put an end to strife.

So the father of the faithful replied in language that might well extend beyond the strife of herdsmen and shepherds to the strife of "pastors and teachers" in many a church and nation. —*(Stanley.)*

From the conduct of Abram we may learn lessons of prudence in dealing with the evils of society, especially those which closely affect ourselves. 1. To check them in their rising. The strife had only extended to the servants, but Abram foresaw that it would extend further unless some arrest were put upon it. Therefore he was determined to put an end to the evil before it had grown too great. 2. To assert some great principle, the truth of which all must acknowledge. They were "brethren," and if this fact were only considered in the light of clear reason and a good conscience, there could be no strife or ill will. Thus St. Paul sought to compose the differences between the members of the Church at Rome by the assertion of some great principle which, were it considered, must unite them all in love.

To be a peacemaker is to possess a likeness to God, who is Himself the author of reconciliation.

There was yet a higher sense in which they were "brethren," viz., in their religion. They professed the same faith and the same mode of worship, and as disciples of a religion breathing love and peace, goodwill and good offices, it could not but be attended with the worst consequences were they now to fall out with each other, and present the sad spectacle of a divided brotherhood. Indeed, if one of the laws of our adoption into the family of God is that we become in all things brethren to each other, and bound to study each other's interest, how little does that sacred relation effect, if it does not avail to extinguish our mutual animosities? When we see the quarrels and the coldnesses, the lawsuits and strifes between those who are not only bound by the common tie of Christian fraternity, but by the closest bonds of affinity and blood, are we not tempted to inquire, Can these men be indeed "brethren?" Can they all be trusting to the same hope of salvation, and expecting, or even desiring, to dwell together in the same heaven?—*(Bush.)*

Verse 9. Abram's conduct was marked—1. By humility. He was the heir of a large inheritance—the land was distinctly promised to him; yet he is not puffed up with pride, he assumes no haughty bearing. To his nephew, to whom no such promises were made, he says, "Is not the whole land before thee?" Thus in his humility he boasts not in his superior portion. 2. By condescension. Abram, as the elder of the two and as called of God, might have claimed submission from one who was but an attendant; and also the right of first choice. But he waived his prerogative, and acted the part of an inferior in order to preserve peace. The proposal originates with him. If they must separate, it shall be after a manner which becomes godly men. Such condescension wins the truest honour, creates the largest influence, for "the meek shall inherit the earth." How many quarrels and cruel wars might have been prevented if men strove, as with a godly ambition, who should be the first to make proposals of peace! 3. By generosity. It was but ordinary justice that they should divide the land equally, yet Abram concedes to Lot the right of choice, and this though he knew that the land on the other side of him afforded richer pasture. What nobleness of mind did he display! He who has strong faith in God can afford to be generous towards man.

Light is seen and is multiplied by the various surfaces on which it falls, the whole scene of it being enlarged by every particle which it brightens; so the reality and beauty of the believer's faith towards God is seen in the performance of his duty towards all around him.

The heavenly principle of forbearance evidently holds the supremacy in Abram's breast. He walks in the moral atmosphere of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. vi. 28-42.)—*(Murphy).*

"Wilt thou to the left hand," etc. An eternal shining example, and a watch-word of the peace-loving magnanimous, self-denying character which is the fruit of faith.—*(Lange).*

He could have claimed the exclusive possession on the high ground of the Divine promise and plan. He could have said, "If the land is not large enough for us both, then you must seek another country, or even return to the land whence you came out." But this exclusiveness is not the spirit of our holy religion. We cannot assume to stand upon our Divine right, and claim all the privileges and promises, leaving no room for others, nor giving them over to uncovenanted mercies. In the true spirit of grace, we are to be gracious and conciliatory and peace-making, *for we be brethren.* Nor need we all seek to occupy the very same ground, nor claim the same territory. There is room enough for all names and claims that are truly Christian. There is much land to be possessed, and God has a field for all denominations to cultivate.—*(Jacobus.)*

Had Abram stood upon his rights, he would have but followed the selfish principles which govern the generality of mankind in their dealings with one another. He is a spiritual man, not who lives according to the maxims of the world, but beyond them. The child of faith has his eye fixed upon those eternal realities before which the temporary advantages of this world are as nothing.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 10—13.

A WORLDLY CHOICE.

The character of Lot, though it has many faults, has a bright side. He was unquestionably a "righteous" man, in whom conscience had been awakened to a sense of what was pure and just, for he "was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked." He, too, had left his father's house, and clave to Abram in his faith during all their wanderings through the land, and in the journey to Egypt and the return. But Lot's besetting sin was *worldliness.* This great evil lies as a dark shade upon his character and spreads itself throughout the whole of his history. It is probable that the worldly spirit grew stronger within him during his sojourn amidst the luxury and pride of Egypt, for those forms of temptation are the most dangerous which answer to our dispositions In accordance with the prevailing fault in his character we find that Lot makes a worldly choice. That such was its nature is clear from the following facts—

I. **It was determined by external advantages.** "He lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt" (verse 10). The beauty and luxuriance of the place have become proverbial. It drew together vast numbers of men who had grown rich upon its productions, and built themselves into prosperous nations. Here was a strong temptation to such a man as Lot, whose chief desire was to increase his wealth, little heeding how he might thereby place his spiritual character in peril. The best and purest motives were weak in him. He was guided by no spiritual principle, and therefore shaped his course by external advantages. Such conduct is condemned by religion. 1. *External advantages are not the chief end of life.* Lot was guided in his choice by the beauty of the country, the richness of the pasturage, and the prosperity of the inhabitants. It is not wrong to employ means for increasing our wealth, or to take delight in the natural beauties of the world. Religion does not oblige us to seek the leanest pastures and to content ourselves with desolation and barrenness. But when we make worldly profit, comfort, and external beauty our chief aim, we sin against God—we miss what is the great end of life. Wealth is not the one thing needful; and he cannot be a religious man who makes this his great aim in life, having no regard to what is of far higher importance, the peace of his conscience arising from a sense of duty done towards God and man. The chief end of life is to glorify God, and to prepare our souls for the future state. All else should be subordinated to this. We are placed here, not to serve our own selfish interests at any cost, but to do our duty and to look for our place and reward from God. 2. *External advantages are not the true happiness of life.* True happiness is the very life of life, which all human experience teaches us does not consist in the abundance of the things which a man possesseth. How many are unhappy in the midst of outward splendour and the means of enjoyment! Some faults of disposition, the selfishness which has grown up with increasing wealth, or a sad burden resting upon the conscience, have dulled all enjoyment, and things that were made to give delight languish in the eye. The greatest happiness in life is found in doing deeds of kindness and good will to others, and in serving God. He who, for the sake of growing rich, refuses to follow that course of life which is most in accordance with his natural ability and tastes, and where he could be most useful to his fellow-men, cannot expect to have any real happiness. He is out of frame with his circumstances, and true enjoyment is impossible. Peace of conscience, too, must be considered. If *that* makes a void in the heart, all the good things in this world cannot fill it up. How little does the true joy of life depend upon what is outward! Good men, even in the midst of privation and suffering, have felt a peace above all earthly dignities. 3. *External advantages, when considered by themselves, tend to corrupt the soul.* If we choose our path in life by these and not from higher motives, we nourish our selfishness, we weaken the moral principle, and our spiritual sensibility becomes dull. We come under the influence of a base materialism, which tends to efface the true glory of life and to degrade man to the level of the brute.

II. It was ungenerous. With a noble generosity, Abram offered to Lot his choice of the whole land. If Lot's finer feelings had not been blunted by his selfishness, he would have passed the compliment to Abram, and declined the offer. But he grasps eagerly at the chance of wealth. In his own opinion he may have regarded himself as a shrewd man, one who would not let the main chance slip out of any weak compliance with the claims of his moral nature. But it showed a mean spirit to take advantage thus of the generosity of a friend. There are many such who take delight in generous natures only for the sake of what they can gain. Lot ought to have caught the spirit of his kinsman, and to have answered in the same dignified and noble manner. But he had too mean a soul for this. Such selfish men are the most unsatisfactory of friends. They fail us in the hour of trial. Such intense worldliness unfits men for all the duties of friendship.

III. It showed too little regard for spiritual interests. "The men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." As this is mentioned in connection with Lot's choice, it is most likely that he was aware of the fact. The wickedness of this people was known to him, yet he determines to run the risk. The sins of the people of Sodom were of more than common vileness and grossness, and they were nourished to that moral rankness by the very luxuriance of the soil, which formed so attractive a feature in the eyes of Lot. The prophet Ezekiel tells us how the vices of Sodom were to be traced to three causes—"pride, fulness of head, and abundance of idleness" (Ezek. xvi. 49). All these evils were fully known to Lot when he made his choice; yet, blinded by the love of gain, he rushed into their midst. How great the evil to which he was exposing himself! 1. *The loss of religious privileges.* No worship of God was established in Sodom. No faith which had any claim to be called a religion was possible in the midst of such sensuality. It was a dangerous experiment to enter a community having no religious privileges, and where there was not even the chance of introducing them. It must be a hardy plant of piety which can thrive in such a soil. Lot may have quieted his conscience by the thought that he could be a means of blessing to the inhabitants of Sodom. But his selfishness, which would only have been increased by his dwelling among such people, would have enfeebled every effort to do good. No man intent only on worldly gain can be a missionary. 2. *The contagion of evil example.* The moral atmosphere of Sodom was so tainted as to expose weak virtue to the risk of the foulest infection. Dangerous it was even to the strong. He who goes into such a society without a sufficient call of duty and great strength of principle, runs the risk of being himself turned to ungodliness.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 10. If Lot had possessed a higher moral instinct he would have replied to Abram's proposal at once. He would have no need to look round upon the land. His was the cautious deliberation of a selfish man, who was determined to secure his own profit.

Lot judged by sight and sense, according to the world's judgment. The worldly man is under the tyranny of *appearances.*

But how does young Lot conduct himself on this occasion? He did not, nor could he object to the generous proposal that was made to him; nor did he choose Abram's situation, which though lovely in the one to offer, would have been very unlovely in the other to have accepted. In the choice he made he appears to have regarded *temporal advantages* only, and entirely to have overlooked the danger of his situation with regard to religion. "He lifted up his eyes, and beheld a well-watered plain;" and on this he fixed his choice, though it led him to take up his abode in Sodom. He viewed it, as we should say, merely with a grazier's eye. He had better have been in a wilderness than there. Yet many professors of religion, in choosing situations for themselves, and for their children, continue to follow his example. We shall perceive in the sequel of this story what kind of harvest his well-watered plain produced him.—*(Fuller.)*

The grasping worldly spirit is associated with meanness of soul, which blunts the perceptions of moral beauty.

No outward conditions, however fair and promising, will prove a paradise for a man as long as he makes it his highest good to seek his own profit. Selfishness will at length eat out the very core of his happiness. There is only one supreme good for man. To remove from the region of the means of grace for the purpose of carrying God's truth to those who are in darkness is to be commended, and he who undertakes that work in a right spirit will find that God can make rivers to spring up in the desert. But he who wilfully leaves behind him the outward privileges of religion for the sake of gain exposes his soul to great peril. The loss of the outward ordinances of religion is not easily compensated.

He can hardly be supposed to have been ignorant of the character of the people of Sodom, for they declared their sin in the most open and unblushing manner, as if in defiance of heaven and earth; nor could he but have been aware of the tendency of evil communications to corrupt good manners. But as he seems to have left them without regret, so it would appear that he approached Sodom without fear. What benefits he was likely to lose—what dangers to incur by the step, seem not to have entered his mind. His earthly prosperity was all that engaged his thoughts, and whether the welfare of his soul was promoted or impeded he did not care. This conduct no one hesitates to condemn, yet how many are there that practically pursue the same heedless and perilous course in their great movements in life! With the single view of bettering their worldly condition they often turn their backs upon the means of grace, and, reckless of consequences, plant themselves and their families in places where Sabbaths and sanctuaries are unknown, and where they are constantly exposed to the most pernicious influences. Alas, at how dear a price are such worldly advantages purchased! Well will it be for them if their goodly plains and fields do not finally yield such a harvest of sorrow as was gathered by hapless Lot.—*(Bush.)*

In the most marked features of his sin, Lot is punished. 1. For his worldly-mindedness He failed to gain that which he had set his heart on, for in the battle with the kings he suffered the loss of all his property. "They took Lot *and his goods.*" In the destruction of Sodom he had to leave all behind, and to flee for his life. 2. For his ungenerous conduct towards Abram he is brought under frequent obligations to him. Abram rescued him from the captivity of war, and made intercession for the city where he dwelt. He was a friend to him in his poverty. 3. For his disregard of the interests of his soul, the tone of his religious character became lowered. His moral principle was weakened by the pernicious atmosphere of ungodliness around him. Both himself and his family followed religion with but a languid interest—with so weak a devotion that they were overmastered by the influences of the world. So it comes to pass that men are punished in those very things from which they expected the highest worldly advantage. This is the solemn irony of Providence.

The memory of the Garden of Eden had not yet perished from among men. All nations have had their traditions of a Golden Age, some lost Paradise.

Verse 11. The selfish spirit is prompt to secure its own ends. Lot begins to choose at once, and without delay proceeds to take possession of his rich portion.

How vile is the sin of covetousness, which so dulls the conscience as to permit a man to enjoy what he has gained by an ungracious action!

The words "all the plain" seem to hint at the grasping disposition of Lot. Nothing less than this will satisfy him. This *lust of land*, the inordinate desire to add "house to house and lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth," has given birth to deeds of tyranny and oppression.

It was better that Abram and Lot should part, for events were pointing to a possible separation in heart. It is well to secure peace, even at some pain and inconvenience to ourselves.

As nature, affection, religion, affliction, all conspired to unite them, no doubt the prospect of separation was a severe trial to the feelings of Abram; but it was a friendly parting, and whatever blank was made by it in his happiness, it was speedily and abundantly compensated by renewed manifestations of favour from that Almighty Friend "who sticketh closer than a brother."—*(Bush).*

Thus, for awhile, is the path of faith more lonely. The true believer is more than ever cast on God. The Lots "choose" according to the sight of their eyes, and so, by degrees, get from communion with the godly to communion with the godless. Unlike souls, sooner or later, must separate. If there be not one spirit, no bond or arrangement can keep men long together. Each is gravitating to his place by a law which none can gainsay—dust to dust, and the spirit to God who is a a spirit. Let us not forget the steps of Lot. First "he saw;" then "he chose;" then "he journeyed from the east," like some before him; then "he pitched towards Sodom;" then "he dwelt there." In a word, he walked by sight, then by self-will, then away from the light, then towards the unclean world, at last to make his home in it. This is the path of Lots in every age. And such, though "righteous" and "saved," are only "saved so as by fire."—*(Jukes: Types of Genesis.)*

Verse 12. The children of faith are content with their promised portion. Their present temporal condition does not disturb their hope and confidence in God.

It is possible, after all, that Lot's principle fault lay in pitching his tent in the place he did. If he could have lived on the plain, and preserved a sufficient distance from that infamous place, there might have been nothing the matter; but perhaps he did not like to live alone, and therefore "dwelt *in the cities* of the plain and pitched his tent *towards Sodom.*" The love of society, like all other natural principles, may prove a blessing or a curse; and we may see by this example the danger of leaving religious connections; for as man feels it not good to be alone, if he forego these, he will be in a manner impelled by his inclinations to take up with others of a contrary description.—*(Fuller.)*

He who sets his face towards the tents of sin will soon become the victim of the dangerous fascination of the enchanted ground, and unless the grace of God prevails over his weakness, be drawn onwards, step by step, to his destruction.

How dangerous it is to commit ourselves to a course of sin, even where the motions of it are scarcely perceptible! This is like venturing on the outer edge of the whirlpool, until we are carried faster and faster through the giddy round and at last swallowed up in the terrible vortex!

Now that the covenant head has fairly a footing in the promised land in his own covenant right, let us look back from this point at the covenant thread in the history of the nations and persons. We find the general table of nations in chap. x., leaving us with Shem's line, so as to trace the covenant lineage. And in chap. xi. accordingly, after the narration of the event which led to the dispersion of nations and peopling of the earth, Shem's line is resumed so as to trace it to Terah, where we are introduced to Abram, the covenant head. Accordingly, of the sons of Terah, we find Lot and his posterity dropped, and Abram left alone in the list, as he in whom the promises descend—the conveyancer of blessings to all the nations.—*(Jacobus.)*

Verse 13. The greatest depravity is often found amongst the inhabitants of the most fertile lands. Such is the ingratitude of human nature that where the gifts of God are most lavish there men most forget Him.

It is one of the moral dangers of prosperity that men become so satisfied with this present world that they think they have no need of God.

We may purchase worldly prosperity too dearly. 1. If it nourishes our selfishness and pride. 2. If it deprives of the benefit of religious ordinances. 3. If it exposes us to the contagion of evil examples. 4. If the spirit of the world so increases upon us that we forget God and our duty.

As a bar of iron has its breaking strain, so for every man there is a certain strength of temptation which his moral nature is not able to withstand. It is dangerous for us willingly to expose ourselves to the power of evil acting with its greatest force.

The grace of God will support a man in the ordinary temptations of life, but to rush into the midst of the most tainted atmosphere of sin is daring presumption.

"Sinners *before the Lord* exceedingly." Men are to be estimated as they stand *in the sight of God*. *Crime* has reference to the evils inflicted upon society, but *sin* has reference to man's moral accountability to God.

The higher blessings of good society were wanting in the choice of Lot. It is probable he was a single man when he parted from Abram; and, therefore, that he married a woman of Sodom. He has in that case fallen into the snare of matching, or, at all events, mingling with the ungodly. This was the damning sin of the antediluvians (Gen. vi. 1–7). *Sinners before the Lord exceedingly.* Their country was as the garden of the Lord. But the beauty of the landscape, and the superabundance of the luxuries it afforded, did not abate the sinful disposition of the inhabitants. Their moral corruption only broke forth into greater vileness of lust, and more daring defiance of heaven. They sinned *exceedingly*, and *before the Lord*. Lot has fallen into the very vortex of vice and blasphemy—*(Murphy)*.

It is an awful character which is here given of Lot's new neighbours. All men are sinners; but they were "wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." When Abram went to a new place it was usual for him to rear an altar to the Lord; but there is no mention of anything like this when Lot settled in or near to Sodom—*(Fuller)*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 14—18.

THE SAINTS' COMFORT IN SOLITUDE.

Abram and Lot, who had so long lived together in loving companionship, are now parted from each other. It was necessary that he to whom the promises were made should stand by himself, as the head of a race chosen of God to illustrate the ways of His providence and to be the channels of His grace to mankind. Human companionship would have been grateful to such a nature as Abram's, but now he must dwell alone. Such solitude has wonderful compensations.

I. **The Divine voice is more distinctly heard.** With his friend separated from him, and the painful memory of trials so lately endured, Abram stood in need of encouragement. This was graciously granted. God spoke to him, and showed him his large inheritance. God still speaks to the souls of men. Every strong conviction of the reality of eternal truths is a fresh communication of God to the soul. But in the crowded ways of life, with its distractions, the strife of tongues and tumult of the passions, God's voice is seldom heard. It is with us as it was with Abram. When all is taken from us and we are alone, then God draws near to us and speaks. We need this consolation. 1. *To confirm our faith.* Every grace of God in us must partake of our own imperfection, and we cannot expect that the grace of faith will prove an exception. All that we do, know, or feel must be tainted by our own earthliness. There are also grievous trials to faith, and when they press most heavily there is danger lest the soul should faint. We need the felt experience of a Presence greater than ourselves, and bidding us be of good cheer. Appearances often seem to be against us in this world until we are almost tempted to suspect that our very religion is a delusion. The facts of physical science have the advantage of verification. They can be assured as coming out clear from every fair trial. But in spiritual things we must *venture* much, and the effort of doing this sometimes severely taxes our strength. The sense of our own past failures oppresses us, lowers the tone of our spiritual life, and weakens the effort of our will. Therefore our faith needs frequent encouragement. God gave the life of faith at first, and His visitation is still needed to preserve it from destruction. Spiritual life, as the natural, draws breath in a suitable atmosphere. The loving presence of God is the very breath of our life. We must acknowledge the fact that the soul depends wholly upon God for its life. Again, it is necessary for us to hear God's voice speaking to the soul, because—2. *We require a renewed sense of the Divine approval.* It is a gracious sign of His favour when God speaks loving words to our souls. It is the light of His countenance which is our true joy—the very life of our life. It is in this way—speaking in Bible language—that God "knoweth the righteous," or recognises them as His own. He knows their works, their struggles with temptation, their strong desire to do His will in the face of all difficulties. Though their obedience is imperfect He approves of them in the tenderness of His goodness, for they are true at heart. "He remembereth that they are dust." We need this renewed sense of the Divine approval, *in order that we may justify to ourselves our conduct as spiritual men.* On the strength of our belief in God we have committed ourselves to a new course of life. We have laid hold of certain truths, which, when they are really considered, impose upon us a kind of conduct different from the rest of mankind. We should be able to justify ourselves in the ways of our life, and this we can only do by assuring ourselves that we are well-pleasing to God. 3. *We require comfort for the evils we have suffered on account of religion.* It is true that like the angels we should do "all for love, and nothing for reward." This is the purest and noblest form of obedience. Still the approving love of God is in itself a reward, having infinite compensations. Our hearts would fail in the midst of the most exalted duty unless we were assured that our labour was not in vain in the Lord. Abram at this time needed strong consolation and the recompense of God's approving voice. He had yielded to Lot, apparently to his own disadvantage. He had been obliged to part from his friend, the loving companion of many years. One would expect to find him in great sorrow, but in the midst of it God appears and brings comfort. Thus our extremity is often God's opportunity for giving us special consolations. The darkest hour of our night is that just before the dawn of a day which brings us light, and peace, and prosperity.

II. The Divine promises are more clearly apprehended.—God spake to Abram in words which promised good things to come. He chose the time when the patriarch was alone. "And the Lord said unto Abram, *after that Lot was separated from him*, lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward. For all the land which thou seest to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever." (Verses 14, 15.) In like manner it is with us in our solitude, when the world is shut out and our souls commune with God. 1. *We are more free to survey the greatness of our inheritance.* Abram is commanded to look around him on every side, and even to walk through the length and breadth of the land that he might see how large was his inheritance. It is only when we realise God's presence, and His voice speaking within us, that we become really aware how goodly is our heritage and how pleasant is the land which God gives us to possess. In the great architectural works of man's skill, some composure of mind and intentness of vision are necessary to enable us to take in their true grandeur. That elevation of soul which God imparts when He appears and speaks gives us the power to see how great are His gifts, and to imagine what the reserves of His goodness must be. 2. *We have an enhanced idea of the plentifulness of the Divine resources.* This is the third occasion on which the Lord appeared to Abram, but it is the *first* time that it is distinctly promised that he himself is ultimately to possess the land. When the Lord first appeared to Abram, before he left the country of his fathers, he was assured that signal blessings were to be enjoyed by him, and that he was to be the channel of their conveyance to the rest of mankind. On his arrival in Canaan he is told that the land is to be given to his seed. Now, when God visits him for a third time, he is invested with the lordship of the land. The promise becomes clearer and more definite as time advances. It would seem—speaking after the manner of men—that God is never weary of showing Abram the land which He had made over to him as an inheritance. The good things which God promises cannot be taken in at one view. The riches of their glory are revealed in succession. They are from the fulness of God, but they can only be apprehended by us as we receive one degree of grace after another. What happened to Abram is illustrated in the case of every faithful believer. In the solitudes of our soul, when meditating upon God, His promises seem to multiply as we bring them to mind. They grow clearer, and evermore suggest to us higher and better things. In this, as in every grace of God, "To him that hath shall be given." Every promise realised is a pledge of greater good—the sure foundation of eternal riches.

III. We are led on to perceive the spiritual significance of life. The promises made to Abram seem to relate entirely to the present world. But, in this regard, they were never fulfilled. Abram, to the very end of his life, was a wanderer in Canaan. He possessed no part of it, except a place to bury his dead, and this he obtained by purchase. Thus he was led, by the disappointment of any earthly hopes he may have indulged in, to feel that the spiritual is the only reality. He "received not the promises," but by the discipline of Providence the conviction grew stronger from day to day within him, that God has better things in reserve for His children than this world can bestow. Life's hopes become delusive as we proceed, and this is intended to lead us to seek "the better country." If failure and disappointment here produce not *that* blessed result, we must become the victims of dark despair. As the promises which this life gave, and which we foolishly trusted, prove to be deceitful, we should feel that our true home is in heaven. *There* ruined hopes are repaired, and all things completed that concern our eternal good. Such is the spiritual education which the experience of human life imparts, if we only learn to interpret it by God's teaching. We have to acknowledge the fact that in this life we are the victims of delusions, which are only gradually cleared away as our higher faculties grow stronger and more enlightened. 1. *Our senses deceive us.* In early life we are under the tyranny of appearances. In the distant horizon the earth seems to touch the sky. Our world appears to be still, and the sun, moon, and stars to travel round it. The ideas which man in early ages had of external nature were only those of children. As we grow older, and become acquainted with the true principles of science, we learn to correct the reports of sense. We can only know the ultimate facts of nature through study and long observation. We have to get rid of many delusions and misconceptions before we can attain true science. 2. *Our youthful hopes deceive us.* Life promises much to the young. The future is bright and plentiful; but as life passes on, and the hard lessons of experience have to be learned, the pleasing dream vanishes. The world's happiness is seen to be unsubstantial, deceitful, and leading to no permanent good. Could the young fully realise how delusive life's promise is, that ghastly thought would take away all gladness from their hearts. Who, when life opens so full of promise before him, could live an hour, were the sad reality of things fully to come home to him! Thus God teaches us, by the experience of human life, that all real and enduring good is beyond and above us. Like Abram, we are led on, gradually and painfully it may be, to higher things. We are leaving what is unreal and shadowy for "a better and an enduring substance." We shall find in the end that all has failed with us, unless we have learned what is the spiritual significance of life, how we ought to employ it to glorify God and to prepare ourselves for all He shall unfold hereafter. Since the promises of life deceive us, let us learn that "there is nothing sure but heaven."

IV. The spirit of devotion is strengthened. "Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord" (verse 18). As he did at the first, so he does now. He is alone with God, and the spirit of devotion revives and increases. 1. *When God speaks to the soul, our sense of reverence is deepened.* When the world is shut out, and all other objects are cleared away and we are alone with God, then we feel true reverence before so great and holy a presence. We are powerfully affected by the thought of the majesty of God and the littleness of ourselves. 2. *When God speaks, our sense of duty is deepened.* The first duty of all is to adore and worship our God, to build the altar of consecration, and devote ourselves to His service. And this feeling is always strengthened when God appears to our souls. Worship becomes more pleasing and earnest work when we know that we are receiving good, and that the object of it is there to bless. When we are alone with God, it is then that we rise to the summits of devotion and discern somewhat of the glory of that land which God has promised, and which will remain sure to us though all else seem to fail.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 14. God is able to compensate His children for the loss of human companionship. His presence—always with them—is often most manifest when they are left alone.

Even so sweet a blessing as friendship has in it, like all other earthly good, an admixture of evil. The parting of friends is one of the sorrows of human life. Hence the importance of forming a friendship with God, whose love knows no change, and who cannot be severed from us. Abram was the friend of God; and now that he is left alone, the value of that sacred bond becomes more manifest.

Lot had "lifted up his eyes," but only to feed his covetousness. He sought eagerly the goodly land before him, determined to enjoy its plenty, and little caring how he exposed his soul to peril. Now, Abram is commanded to lift up *his* eyes upon a better inheritance, for God's blessing rested upon it, and it was the shadow and promise of higher things. "Thus he who sought this world, lost it; and he who was willing to give up anything for the honour of God and religion, found it."—(*Fuller.*)

Upon his withdrawment from Lot, the Lord again meets him in mercy, and renews to him His gracious covenant-promise. He bids him lift up his eyes and look around the whole horizon, surveying the land on the north and the south, on the east and the west, and then confirms to him and his posterity the gift of the whole as far as the eye could reach. How striking an instance this of the considerate kindness, of the recompensing mercy, of Him with whom we have to do. At the moment when Abram had been making the greatest sacrifices for peace, and demonstrating how loosely he sat by the richest earthly abundance compared with the desire of securing the Divine favour, the Most High visits him with a fresh manifestation of his favour, and comforts him with renewed assurances of his future inheritance.—(*Bush.*)

Abram could not with his outward eye see *all* the land which God was about to give him. He must complete the picture in his imagination, and from what he could see, reason to what he could not. So we can behold but a small portion of our vast inheritance of faith, yet still enough to enable us to divine what God hath prepared for them that love Him.

God says to every believer, "Look *from* the place where thou art." 1. We should not dwell despairingly upon our present losses and privations. We ought not to sorrow as men who have no hope. 2. We should look from that world which we must lose some day to that world which is sure, and abides for ever—Paradise. The golden age of humanity is not here, but is ever beyond and above us.

Now that Lot was separated from Abram, the covenant head stands alone, and in a position to be addressed and dealt with in his covenant relations. He is now parted from his kinsman, the companion of his journeyings, and, isolated in the world, he is to receive the special encouragement of his covenant God. Now he is formally constituted the rightful owner of the land, and inducted into the heritage. He is to make a full survey of the land in all directions, and he is assured that it is his to inherit, and a title deed is given to him for his seed for ever—*(Jacobus).*

Ver. 15. The first promise relates to the person of Abram; in him and in his name are embraced all promised blessings. In the second a seed was more definitely promised to Abram, and also the land of Canaan for the seed. But here, in opposition to the narrow limits in which he is with his herds, and to the pre-occupation of the best parts of the land by Lot, there is promised to him the whole land in its extension, and to the boundless territory, an innumerable seed. It should be observed that the whole fulness of the Divine promise is first unreservedly declared to Abram after the separation from Lot. Lot has taken beforehand his part of the good things. His choice appears as a mild or partial example of the choice of Esau (the choice of the lentile-pottage)—*(Lange).*

Jehovah hath what He giveth; therefore He giveth freely, He cannot deceive.—(*Hughes*).

The heavenly Canaan is to believers not as wages for service they have rendered, but the *gift* of God. It is, strictly speaking, an *inheritance* which we have lawfully derived by reason of our relationship to our Heavenly Father.

The term "for ever," as applied to the land of Canaan, can only mean as long as the subject of it lasts. *That* must come to an end. But the Canaan above can have no end, for, unlike the earthly one, it is pure and unmixed good, and good is in its very nature eternal.

The reasoning of Paul respecting Abram's heavenly hope cannot possibly refer to anything short of the final and eternal inheritance of glory. To that, according to the Apostle—and to nothing short of that—did the patriarch look forward; certainly not to any merely temporary occupation of the land before the end of all things, nor to the possession of it, for a limited though protracted period, during the ages of millennial prosperity. The land of Canaan, and the earth of which it forms a part, may, for anything we can tell, be the local scene and seat of the inheritance that he means. The whole force of the Apostle's argument depends on the contrast which he draws between Abram's condition as a stranger and pilgrim in the land, and his condition as having an eternal abode in heaven. When he formerly dwelt in the land, he confessed that he was a stranger and pilgrim on the earth; so also did his sons, Isaac and Jacob.—(*Chandlish.*)

Verse 16. The spiritual purport of the promise is here further reached, in the innumerable *seed*. The literal increase is not excluded, but this was not all that was meant, else it would be of small moment comparatively. God does not so account of the mere earthly progeny. He rebuked their boast of being Abram's seed according to the flesh. But the spiritual posterity, and the true Israel, after the spirit, *this* was the grant here made of Abram. "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abram's seed and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. iii. 29.)—(*Jacobus.*)

Abram's household is smaller than it was at the first; he is old and childless, and yet he believes that his seed shall be as the dust of the earth.

This multitude of seed, even when we take the ordinary sense which the form of expression bears in popular use, far transcends the productive powers of the promised land in its utmost extent. Yet to Abram, who was accustomed to the petty tribes that then roved over the pastures of Mesopotamia and Palestine, this disproportion would not be apparent. A people who should fill the land of Canaan would seem to him innumerable. But we see that the promise begins already to enlarge itself beyond the bounds of the natural seed of Abram.—(*Murphy.*)

The multitude of the heirs of salvation must be great, for God will not allow the costly work of our redemption to end in an insignificant result. The fruits of grace must be on a scale with the Divine magnificence. The sons of glory will be many, even in the estimate of the Divine arithmetic. Hence, St. John saw in heaven "A multitude which no man could number."

Ver. 17. God repeats His promises for the support of the faith of His servants.

We are bidden to survey the utmost dimensions of God's promises (Eph. iii. 19).

It is permitted to us to see and enjoy some portion of our spiritual inheritance; yet this conveys no sufficient idea of its greatness. We have dim suggestions of what we shall be, but the full glory of it "doth not yet appear."

The largest latitude is thus allowed him, as the proprietor of the soil, to walk over the land in its utmost limits, at his own pleasure, and to call it all his own, and feel himself to be inducted thus, by the Divine grant, into the formal proprietorship of the whole country. And this grant of the earthly Canaan is typical of that higher heritage of the heavenly Canaan—the believer's land of promise. "For we which have believed do enter into rest" (Heb. iv. 3). "For if Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterwards have spoken of another day?" (Heb. iv. 8). And this is the better country, even an heavenly, which the covenant God of Abram promises to give to him personally.—(*Jacobus.*)

The promises of God to His children are so great that it seems to us impossible that they shall be fulfilled to us; and, indeed, it is one of the great trials of our faith to believe them. It is said that a certain beggar once made an application to Alexander the Great for alms. The king, upon hearing the request, gave two hundred talents of silver to his servant, and commanded him to convey them to the poor man. The beggar, astonished at so unexpected a charity, said, "Take it back and say, 'this is too much for a beggar to receive.'" Whereupon Alexander said, "Tell him that if it is too much for a beggar to receive, it is not too much for a king to give." So when God gives He does not do it according to our narrow, niggardly notions, but He gives as a king, as one who is the proprietor of all kings.

What we can *see* with the spiritual eye we really possess.

Arise, walk through the land. 1. God allows His blessings to be put to the test of experiment. We can verify them one by one by observation and experience. We can feel and know. 2. God allows His blessings to become a vantage ground for faith. What He gives now promises to us higher and better things.

Ver. 18. "Abram removed his tent." He is still a wanderer and pilgrim. Our human habitations are shifting, and there is only one certain dwelling place—our eternal home in heaven.

A third altar is here built by Abram. His wandering course requires a varying place of worship. It is the Omnipresent whom he adores. The previous visits of the Lord had completed the restoration of his inward peace, security, and liberty of access to God, which had been disturbed by his descent into Egypt, and the temptation that had overcome him there. He feels himself again at peace with God, and his fortitude is renewed. He grows in spiritual knowledge and practice under the great teacher.—*(Murphy.)*

Believers, wherever they go, should provide for the public and private worship of God. In this Abram showed himself "the father of the faithful." As it is a necessity of our physical nature that we should have some abode, so it is a necessity of our spiritual nature that we should find an abode for the Highest, a place where our own soul has a home, and where we feel the comforting presence of our God.

In all his wanderings through the world, and the varied scenes and changes through which he passes, the believer makes the worship of his God the first and last consideration.

Upon every remove, it is always recorded of Abram that he built an altar unto the Lord. Nothing could hinder him; not the fatigues and journeyings, the approach of age, the presence of enemies, the most difficult duties of life, nor the increase of his possessions. Nothing was allowed to interfere with his devotion to God. He kept up his correspondence with heaven.

Abram's altar was intended—1. As a public profession of religion in the midst of enemies; 2. As a constant memorial of God's presence; 3. As a tribute of gratitude for His mercies; 4. As expressing a sense of obligation to His love, and a desire to enjoy His presence; 5. As a sign of his determination to be fully dedicated to God.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XII.

BY THE

REV. WM. ADAMSON.

Abram and History! Ver. 1-20. (1) The unchanged habits of the East, says Stanley, render it a kind of living Pompeii. The outward appearances, which, in the case of the Greeks and Romans, we knew only through art and writing—through marble, fresco, and parchment—in the case of Jewish history we know through the forms of actual men living and moving before us, wearing the same garb, speaking almost the same language as Abram and the patriarchs. (2) From Ur of the Chaldees, remarks Landels, comes forth, in one sense, the *germ* of all that is good throughout succeeding generations. His appearance, *like that of some great luminary in the heavens,* marks an epoch in the world's history. A *stream* of influence flows from him—not self-originated, but deriving its existence from those heaven-clouds of Divine dew of blessing resting upon this lofty summit of his soul. (3) Widening as it flows, and promoting, in spite of the occasional checks and hindrances it meets with, spiritual life and health, that stream is vastly more deserving of exploration and research than the streams of the Lualaba and Niger, or the sources of the Nile and Zambesi. Such exploration and research will be productive of incalculable benefit to those who engage therein with right motives and aspirations.

"Truth springs like harvest from the well-ploughed field,
And the soul feels it has not searched in vain."
—*Bonar.*

Father of Faithful! Ver. 1—9. Here we have—1. The Call (ver. 1); 2. The Command (ver. 1); 3. The Covenant (ver. 2); 4. The Conditions (ver. 3); 5. The Compliance (ver. 4); 6. The Conversion (ver. 7); and 7. The Considerations.—The call was from God. The command was to leave his native land. The covenant was protection and preservation, etc. The condition was that of simple trust and confidence. The compliance was that Abraham journeyed first to Haran, thence to Canaan. The conversion of Abraham was evidently the erection of the "altar," erected wherever he pitched his tent. And the considerations are (1) That God calls and commands each of the sons of men to come out from a world lying in wickedness, and make life a pilgrimage to heaven. (2) That God covenants and conditions with each of the sons of men obeying this call to crown their lives with loving-kindness and tender mercies. (3) That God counts and compensates for all sacrifices and sufferings endured in complying with His call with the Crown of Life that fadeth not away.

"One of the chivalry of Christ! He tells us how to stand
With rootage like the palm, amid the maddest whirl of sand."
—*Massey.*

Darkness and Light! Ver. 1. (1) In the early Genesis of Creation we have the material chaos and darkness, succeeded by the introduction of light. Here we have God saying in the *moral* world, as He had uttered before in the natural, "Let there be light." As Stanley Leathes says: The light was making itself manifest after the Babel chaos and gloom. And that which made manifest was light. The proof that it was light was in the light which it diffused; just as when, with closed eyes, I am told that a light has been brought into the midnight room of darkness, I open them to have proof that there is light. Abraham could have no higher proof. (2) Other gods had not cared for him—had held no communication with him—had not made themselves known to him as living beings; but this Being had. He had come out of the darkness and made light all about Him. He had come out of the silence and spoken with the voice of the Word of God. He had convinced Abram that He lived, and that from Him all living creatures enjoyed life. Abram believed God; and obedience quickly followed. (3) When Richard I. returned in disguise to England, after his escape from the Austrian dungeons, the peasants required evidence that he was indeed the king. Richard appeared amongst them; he spoke to them; he performed such feats of strength as Richard only was known to achieve; he showed them his signet-ring. They were satisfied. Believing that "Richard was himself again," they *immediately* tendered him their allegiance, and complied with his royal requirements to proceed with him. Faith, *i.e.* true faith, cannot be separated one from the other,—they are more intimately joined than the Siamese twins.

"Therefore look and believe, for works will follow spontaneous,
Even as the day the sun; for Christian works are no more than
Animate faith and love, as flowers are the animate springtide."—*Longfellow.*

Demand and Supply! Ver. 1. (1) That God called Abram is the Mosaic utterance under Divine Inspiration. But had there been no craving in Abram's mind and heart, no yearning after the Infinite, no aspirations after a knowledge of the true God, "O that I knew where I might find Him!" Was there no demand answering to the supply? Was there no craving to be met by the gratification? Surely. It is only reasonable to suppose that Jehovah responded to the heart-hunger of Abram. To him the bread of idol-knowledge and of creature-worship was as bone-dust or fruit of Sodom. The hunger was appeased only at the cost of moral dyspepsia—of spiritual leanness. The aspiration became intenser. (2) The law of growth through craving is, as Ladd remarks, fundamental; it is capable of illustration from every form of animal life. Put life into matter, and you get as one of its earliest exhibitions the same phenomenon, which remains with the life until its extinction; you get craving, which, being met by supply, becomes the minister of higher life and growth. In the souls of men this instinctive craving under various forms acts as the spur of the rider to drive men towards the Divine, in which alone they can find satisfaction and rest.

"Every inmost aspiration is God's angel
undefiled;
And in every "O my Father!" slumbers
deep "Here, My child."—*Dscheladeddin.*

Abram's Aspiration! Ver. 2. (1) No more beautiful description of the methods of intellectual and spiritual vitality can anywhere be found than is given us in the Duke of Argyll's "Reign of Law." He unfolds the relations of the external force of the earth to the internal force which moves the bird's wing. (2) What God does for nature He does not deny to man. He puts a force in the soul. That soul can float beside the albatross, at rest, where there is nothing else at rest in the tremendous turmoil of its own stormy seas, which has received the Divine Force. (3) Under Divine tuition Abram was trained to beat down resistance from without by force that answered from within. Shall we say that God enabled Abram to use—as the bird uses the breezes of air—his soul's yearning after Himself!

"God found one worthy to be drawn
From out the deepening social night,
And set him as a star of dawn,
And herald of the greater Light."

Abram's Separation! Ver. 3. "We may apply," says Gibson, "the same term to Abram, which the Apostle Paul applies to himself, when he says, 'Separated unto the Gospel of God.' As a skilful schoolmaster trains his pupil by a regular graduated series of lessons, so God trained Abram by a series of separations. His first lesson, and one in the acquiring of which the patriarch proved an apt scholar, was when he separated from Ur of the Chaldees by Divine command (ver. 1). Then another lesson had to be acquired when he was again summoned to leave Charran behind. Having graduated in this standard, he underwent separation from Canaan itself (ver. 6), when he erected his tent as a pilgrim and stranger in the land, and his altar as a mountain, from whose lofty summit faith's eye might descry the heavenly home on high. Again, we find him at school in Egypt, learning the lesson of separation from the world more and more. And this repeated separation was not for his sake only, or that of his descendants by birth, but for the "world's sake." "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." As a good man has wide sympathies and aims in the education of his child, so with God. If the Christian father educates his son for the sake of his fellow-creatures as well as for his own, surely much more would the Divine Father be educating Abraham for the sake of "all the families of the world."

"At God's commandment self-exiled,
Alone he left his native clan,
Led forth by faith, like a blind man
Led by a simple-hearted child."

Abram's Call! Ver. 4. (1) The Talmud, in face of Gen. xii., asserts that Abram left Ur on account of Nimrod's attempt to kill him. The king's design, however, was frustrated by Eleazar, a slave of Abram, whom Nimrod had presented to him. He told Abram of the king's dream—of the interpretation which the wise men put upon it—and of the king's design to kill him. So Abram hastened to the house of Noah, and remained there hiding while the servants of the king searched his own home and the surrounding country in vain, and he remained a longer time—even until the people had forgotten him. Then Abram said to Therach, his father, "Let us all journey to another land; let us go to Canaan." And Noah and his son Shem added their entreaties to his, until Therach consented to do as they wished. And they went forth to Charran. (2) The Scripture *asserts* a Divine call. It *assures* us that this Divine call did not include the name of the land to which he would take them. It *authorises* the belief that Abram obeyed God's command in simple faith, *i.e.*, in entire ignorance of the "where." And it *associates* Charran with Abram's emigration only so long as Terah lived. The puerilites and perversions of the Talmudic Tales bear on their faces their own condemnation as false witnesses; whereas God's word has on it the impress of truth.

"Pure is the Book of God, with sweetness
filled;
More pure than massive, unadulterate
gold;
More sweet than honey from the rock distilled." —*Mant.*

Obedience of Faith! Ver. 4. (1) Suppose a man were to build a tower without any foundation, intending to place the foundations on the roof. What would happen it is easy to surmise. The fabric would very soon give way. Many do this in spiritual things. They place "the foundations of faith" upon the superstructure of obedience. It is obedience that must rise up on the basis of faith. "Trust in God and do the right," is a wise maxim; but some make the proverb an inverted pyramid. Place Pharaoh's great pyramid on its apex, and we can easily conceive the result. Abram *first* believed, *then* obeyed God. (2) "Hasten onward with your troop to yonder ravine; hold your ground there until I arrive with the main body of the army." Such were the orders of the great general to one of his brigadier officers, and he was obeyed. But whence sprang the subaltern's obedience! He trusted his general's "Until I arrive with the main body of the army." Faith was not the blossom, it was the root, and obedience the flower. Abram's obedience—so prompt and perfect—had its root in Divine trust. Believing God, he obeyed, and went forth, not knowing whither.

"Yes! strong in faith I tread the uneven ways,
And bare my head unshrinking to the blast;
And if the way seems rough, I only clasp
The hand that leads me with a firmer grasp."
—*Lynch.*

Moral Emigration! Ver. 5. (1) When Abram announced his determination to go forth, his keen-sighted friends doubtless inquired to what land he was directed. But the intending emigrant knew not. They would suggest that all might be a delusion; or that it might be far off, and the way perilous; or that, even should it be reached, he might find it a bleak and inhospitable desert. *But Abram trusted God on all points.* (2) When Bunyan allegorized the sinner's call from the City of Destruction, he fully realised its analogy to that of Abram. To the dwellers in the "City of Destruction" the "Promised Land" was more or less a doubtful realm—if not doubtful in its existence, certainly so in its locality and characteristics. But the moral pilgrim would not be deterred from the Divine emprise. *He trusted God on all points.* (3) When a young man receives the Divine call to forsake a world lying in wickedness, and become a stranger and sojourner in the earthly land of "promise and grace," what efforts are put forth by friends to dissuade him from such an emigration. Many, alas! have failed in the fiery ordeal. They have not been able to resist the plausible insinuations, the subtle surmises of professed friends. *They have not trusted God on all points.*

"Faith feels the Spirit's kindling breath
In love and hope, that conquer death;
Faith brings us to delight in God,
And blesses e'en His smiting rod."

Canaan Route! Ver. 5. Westward they went. Two days' travel would bring them to the border of the Euphrates, which would be about ten or twelve feet deep. On rafts of skin, Abraham's goods and chattels would be carried to the western bank; or he may have used boats—circular boats, "round like a shield," as an old historian describes them—built of willow boughs, covered with skins and smeared with bitumen. Once on the west side, a seven days' journey would bring him to Aleppo. The Arabs have a tradition that Aleppo derives it name from "haleb," because Abraham's servants here milked the kine to give to the poor inhabitants. Thence Abraham would proceed to Damascus, and southward to Canaan by way of the beautiful upland district of Gilead and Bashan. On his way, from crag and peak, the pilgrim would catch many a glance of the "Home of his pilgrimage."

"From every mountain's rugged peak
The promised land I view;
And from its fields of fragrant bloom
Come breezes laden with perfume,
To fan my weary brow."

Moreh! Ver. 6. Abraham crossed, no doubt, at the ford of Bethabara. Here would rise before him a stretch of mountain country, several thousand feet high. The only way to enter upon it would be by the ravines of the watercourses, known as the *wadys.* These are steep and winding, and often narrow. Most of them are dry, except in the rainy season. But sometimes they widen out into little valleys and strips of meadow, with a spring gushing up. One of these *wadys* opens with a beautiful rich plain, and as it leads to the place of Sichem probably this was Abraham's selected route. One translation says that Abram came to the "plain," but the Hebrew word is "oak" of Moreh, a little plain between the rocky ridges known as Ebal and Gerisim. No more beautiful and fertile region could the patriarch have selected for his pilgrim tent and altar.

"The fresh young leaves on the hoar oak trees
Quivered and fluttered in glee;
And the merry rills from the mighty hills
Shouted his lullaby."—*Schönberg.*

Divine Repetitions! Ver. 7. (1) In many aspects there is a remarkable parallel between this portion of Genesis and the Gospel narratives of the New Testament. Here we have the Son of God calling Abraham, first in Ur, then in Haran. In the life of David we have this reiteration, so to speak, of Divine will, a reiteration apparent in the prophetic calls. In the New Testament we have the Son of Man calling the disciples twice over at the beginning of His ministry, and again twice over after His resurrection. Even in the Acts of the Apostles Paul seems to have had a similar double call. The same Divine repetitions reappear in the Apocalyptic annals of the Patmos seer. (2) The spiritual lesson is that God's Holy Spirit often repeats His call—the second being in more emphatic and explicit terms. It has been suggested that Abraham was remiss in complying with the call in Ur, hence its repetition in Haran. But this is mere conjecture. The analogy of faith is progressive—a fuller development of the Divine ideal and intention. The captain gives his soldiers a general apprehension of his design and their duty, and on the march he more fully unfolds his design and unveils their duty.

"So, darkness in the pathway of man's life
Is but the shadow of God's providence,
By the great sun of wisdom cast thereon,
And what is dark below is light in heaven."
—*Whittier.*

Promised Possession! Ver. 7 (1) Old Canaan was a very nice country Yet in itself it was scarcely worth while promising i possession. It was nothing to the dominion of Nebuchadnezzar, of Cyrus, of Alexander, of the Cæsars, or of the sovereigns of England. "Is it not, therefore," asks Gibson, "perfectly obvious that the 'promised possession' was not the gift of so many acres, but of a land separated from the nations, from heathenism, from the wickedness of a corrupt world. And that for the 'world's sake.'" (2) It was the Lord's startling statement to the proud children of Abram after the flesh, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day." Messiah's day had begun in Abraham's day; the patriarch *saw* it, and was glad. The day of salvation was scanned by Abram on hope's lofty summit by faith's eye, as Moses surveyed the promised land from Nebo's towering height. "This land" expanded and widened out into the "renewed world." He beheld the fertile and fruitful fields of the Messianic land of grace.

> "He heard the promise as one hears
>   The voice of waters through a wood;
> And Faith foreran th' appointed years,
>   And grasp'd the substance of the good."

Heart-Hunger! Ver. 8. (1) The amœlia, a small jellyfish or speck, driven by its instinctive craving, searches for that in the environment which is fitted to its use. It then makes its whole self into a stomach to wrap about the food which it has secured. Under excitement from this instinctive craving, the locusts go forth in bands, and, braver than the Amazonian warriors of Ashantee, scale walls and smother with their dead bodies the fires which are lit to oppose their progress. In the world of struggling races, this instinctive unrest acts like a mighty hammer to spread out the nations, and fuse them under its blows. This craving, pure and simple, is constitutional, and, therefore, Divine in its origin. In the case of man, the introduction of sin, while it has distorted that craving, has intensified the hunger. (2) The traditions, therefore, about Abram have doubtless a solid substratum of truth. Abram craved after God. His heart hungered after a knowledge of God. Augustine of Milan tells of a "deep-seated craving" which he long tried to satisfy. Such was the heart-hunger of Abram when God revealed Himself as the true and satisfying food. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon the earth that I desire in comparison of Thee." When Abram fed upon this knowledge of God he was satisfied. We do not say that "heart-hunger" ceased. Far otherwise. Each feast of the heart upon Divine knowledge whetted the appetite for more, while it furnished strength and ministered satisfaction.

> "Still, still without ceasing.
>   I feel it increasing,
>   This hunger of holy desire." —*Guyon.*

Travelling South! Ver. 9. (1) There are in this country about forty-five species, says Nell, of the orchis. All these plants are pilgrim-travellers. The early purple, *Orchis Mascula*, every year throws out a new bulb or tubercule, always on the side towards the south. By this means it always changes its position, and little by little advances to the southward. It thus steadily travels on to the bright home of this family of flowers in the tropics—the cloudless land of sun. (2) And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south. The soul, which has heaven for its home patiently grows heavenward—growing up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. Southward from the cold, bleak wastes of worldly conformity—southward to the warm haunt of everlasting flowers—the land of unclouded sunshine.

> "So live that you each year may be,
>   While time glides softly by,
> A little farther from the earth,
>   And nearer to the sky."

Pilgrim Purpose! Ver. 9. (1) Dwellers in houses are exposed to dangers such as the dwellers in tents do not fear. Passive waters become stagnant, while the ruffled waves abide incorrupt. Abram's tent was often searched by winds and rains; yet he was safe from the stagnancy of city life. The gipsy knows little or nothing of the fevers associated with settled dwellings of brick and stone. Moab's ease leads to Moab's being settled on his lees; whereas, Israel by captivity learns what is in his heart towards God, and what is in God's heart towards him. (2) Abram's tent-life was a Divine purpose. It was linked with the encountering of storms and tempests. But the lofty pine of Norway becomes statelier, and strikes its roots more firmly amid the crevices of the mountains, the more the breezes battle amid its spreading boughs. "If my life has been one of trouble, it has also been one of much spiritual blessing. I gained more strength and acquired more knowledge from my varying experience of calm and storm, than otherwise I should. It is through the Divine mercy."

> "Great truths are greatly won, not found by
>   chance,
>   Nor wafted on the breath of summer dream;
> But grasped in the great struggle of the soul,
>   Hard buffeting with adverse wind and
>   stream."—*Bonar.*

Egypt! Ver. 10. In Syria the harvests depend upon the regular seasons of rain. When these rains do not fall a famine follows. Such famines are, as they were, of frequent occurrence in Syria. While Abraham journeyed as a pilgrim-patriarch from Moreh to Hai and Bethel a famine arose, which forced him southwards to Egypt. It was then the great garden-field of the East, and was properly limited to that portion of Africa watered by the Nile. The periodical overflowings of this river made Egypt exceedingly fertile, so that there was generally plenty there when Syria and other eastern countries were passing through all the horrors of famine. Of that plenty Abram heard. He must also have heard of Egypt's king, the first and most powerful of those "shepherd-kings" immortalised in history as such, because they were foreigners, supposed to have belonged to some of the powerful pastoral nations who kept flocks and made wars.

> "Monarchs, the powerful and the strong,
> Famous in history and in song
> Of olden time."—*Longfellow.*

Christian Character! Ver. 11-13. (1) Seaweed plants, which live near the surface of the water, are green, whereas those in lower beds of the sea assume deeper shades of rich olive, and down in the depths still below, far removed from worldly glare, and where no human eye can penetrate, these flowers of ocean are clothed with hues of splendour. (2) Abram's surface qualities do not look so very attractive, mingling as they do with human defect. But the deeper down we gaze into the moral depths of his being, the fairer are the flowers blooming there. Gazing into the clear tranquil depths of Abram's spirit, far removed from worldly glare or natural discernment, we behold richly-coloured graces and virtues.

> "On all things created remaineth the half-effaced signature of God,
> Somewhat of fair and good, though blotted by the finger of corruption."

Faith and Fear! Vers. 12–20. (1) "That portion of the fortifications is naturally so strong and isolated that we need not fear the besiegers there; let us look to the weak points in our defence, and place strong bodies of troops for their protection." Such was the governor's counsel to his subalterns. But the enemy had a subtle and far-seeing leader, who, anticipating such a course on the part of the garrison, actually assailed the strongest—because most unguarded—point of the citadel. The result was as the besieging general calculated upon. They found few soldiers; these few were speedily overcome, and the stronghold captured. (2) Abraham's faith was his strongest point. The enemy of souls assailed it, as in reality the weakest; and the fortress of piety and trust was captured. The "Mansoul of Abram" fell into Satan's hands for the time. Had not the overruling providence of God made a way of escape to Abraham, he would assuredly have been hopelessly enslaved. But as the "Friend of God," he was delivered out of the snare of the fowler and led back to Bethel. (3) It was this fear which led an eminent leader of the Early Reformation to conceal his union with the primitive faith, until the providence of God interposed to save him from the moral ruin which would have inevitably followed, as in the case of Abram. And how often God in mercy thus providentially interferes when Christians are tempted to evade the truth of their union with the Church of the living God!

> "My footsteps seem to slide!" "Child, only raise
> Thine eye to Me, then in these slippery ways
> I will hold up thy goings; thou shalt praise
> Me for each step above."

Sarah's Beauty! Ver. 14. The Talmud relates that on approaching Egypt Abram locked up Sarah in a chest. This chest aroused the suspicion of the Custom-house officer, who suspected smuggled clothes. On Abram at once consenting to pay tribute on clothes, the collector began to think that the contents might be silk. Abram was willing to pay the custom upon the finest silk, which led the officer to ask for custom upon gold. Still the traveller was quite ready to tender the tribute upon gold. This led the tribute-taker to demand whether the box contained "pearls;" but Abram was still willing to pay the toll for jewels. Puzzled by the conduct of Abram, the officer requested that the box should be opened, "whereupon the whole land of Egypt was illumined by the lustre of Sarah's beauty—far exceeding even that of pearls."

> "Alas! that aught so fair could lead astray
> Man's wavering foot from duty's heav'nward way."
>
> *Beresford.*

Divine Dealing! Ver. 20. (1) "At the court of Pharaoh," remarks Robertson, "Abram gained two of the most useful lessons of his life. He learnt that it was not in man that walketh to direct his steps. But he also learnt that all things work together for good to them that love God, and that it is the glory of God to bring good out of evil." (2) Luther said that "temptation and tribulation were a good seminary for Christian scholars." Abram came back from Egypt very rich in cattle, richer still more in a deepened faith in God and His law. Both the temporal and moral wealth were under the guidance and governance of the Good Providence of God. (3) Shall we, then, sin that grace may abound? Shall we fall, like Abram, that treasures of grace may be ours? Shall we fall like David, that priceless jewels of truth may fall to our lot? Shall we forswear, like Peter, that the unsearchable riches of Christ may be more fully our portion? Let it not be so. How shall we, who are freed from sin, live any longer therein? (4) The broken limb, *when re-set by the skilful and kind surgeon*, may prove stronger than before it is broken; but because of this the restored man does not go about breaking every one of his limbs and bones. That were a dangerous experiment. He is content that the broken limb should be stronger, without desiring to have his other limbs broken in the hope of their acquiring a similar increase of strength.

> "Providence is dark in its permissions; yet one day, when all is known,
> The universe of reason shall acknowledge how just and good were they."—*Tupper.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XIII.

BY THE

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Abram and Lot! Vers. 1-18. We have here—I. The Contention, which was (1) unseemly, (2) untimely, and (3) unnecessary. II. The Consolation, which was (1) unbounded, (2) undoubted, and (3) unearthly. Or, we have here—I. The Churlishness of the herdsmen. II. The Selfishness of Lot. III. The Unselfishness of Abram, and IV. The Graciousness of God. Or, we have here—I. The Return of Abram, (1) forgiven and (2) favoured. II. The Request of Abram, (1) forbearing, and (2) foregoing. III. The Reward of Abram (1) forgetting the earthly and (2) foreshadowing the heavenly inheritance. The Lesson-Links or Truth-Thoughts are—1. Wealth means (1) strife, (2) sorrow, and (3) separation. 2. Abram manifests (1) faith, (2) forbearance, and (3) forgetfulness of self. 3. Worldly love means (1) stupidity, (2) suffering, and (3) sinfulness. 4. God manifests (1) favour, (2) fulness, and (3) faithfulness to Abram.

> "The pilgrim's step in vain,
> Seeks Eden's sacred ground!
> But in Hope's heav'nly joys again,
> An Eden may be found."—*Bowring.*

Returns and Reviews! Vers. 1-3. (1) The poet has immortalised the Swiss patriot's sentiments on returning to the Alpine crags and peaks after strange and perilous experiences in exile. The historian has inscribed on the tablet of Church history the devout emotions of Arnaud on his return from danger and exile to the Vaudois Valleys. The *litterateur* has depicted on the page of his tale the joyful sensations of the emigrant, returning in safety and wealth to the home from which he had gone forth in peril and poverty. (2) Abram had been driven by famine into the fruitful fields of Egypt, where he had narrowly escaped reaping death as the fruit of his fears and folly. God had in His wise and merciful Providence brought him back again to Hebron. He, therefore, calls on the name of the Lord. He, no doubt, received with thankfulness the Lord's intimations of mercy as connected with his previous sojourn; and he, doubtless, acknowledged with gratitude God's loving interposition with Pharaoh in his behalf. (3) It is well to go back in review of old spots and past experiences in order to call up instrumentally thereby, says Doudney, the gracious acts, interposing goodness, and boundless benefits of our covenant-God in Christ. The light so shining upon the past prompts us to take down our harp from the willows, and to sing—

> "His love in times past forbids me to think,
> He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink."

Flocks and Herds! Ver. 2. (1) In a very old Egyptian tomb near the Pyramids the flocks and herds of the principal occupant are pourtrayed. The numbers of them are told as 800 oxen, 200 cows, 2,000 goats, and 1,000 sheep. Job at first had 7,000 sheep, 500 yoke of oxen, 3,000 camels, etc. We can thus form some idea of the number and magnitude of the patriarchal flocks and herds. (2) At the present day these are no exaggeration, however startling the figures sound. In an Australian sheep-run one grazier has nearly 20,000 sheep. Not long ago an American sheepowner had as many as 9,000 browsing on the heights of Omaha, so that when a traveller looked forth at daybreak the mountains seemed like waves of the sea. In Zululand the flocks and herds of Cetewayo were immense.

> "Abram's well was fann'd by the breeze,
> Whose murmur invited to sleep;
> His altar was shaded with trees,
> And his hills were white over with sheep."
> *Shenstone.*

Patriarchal Wealth! Ver. 2. (1) Dr. Russell tells us that the people of Aleppo are supplied with the greater part of their butter, cheese, and flesh by the Arabs, Rushmans, or Turcomans, who travel about the country with their flocks and herds, as the patriarchs did of old. Before America became so thickly peopled, its primitive white patriarchs wandered with flocks over the richly-clothed savannahs and prairies. Having collected vast stores of cheese, honey, skins, etc., they would repair to the townships and dispose of them. (2) The Hebrew patriarchs no doubt supplied the cities of Canaan in like manner. Hamor, in chap. xxxiv. 21, expressly speaks of the patriarchs thus trading with his princes and people. La Rogue says that in the time of Pliny the riches both of the Parthians and Romans were melted down by the Arabs, who thus amassed large treasures of the precious metals. This probably explains how Abraham was rich, not only in cattle, but in silver and gold. Not that Abram trusted in his riches.

> "Oh! give me the riches that fade not, nor fly!
> A treasure up yonder! a home in the sky!
> Where beautiful things in their beauty still stay,
> And where riches ne'er fly from the blessed away."
> *Hunter.*

Communion! Ver. 4. (1) Watson says, that he knows of no pleasure so rich—no pleasure so hallowing in its influences, and no pleasure so constant in its supply of solace and strength, as that which springs from the true and spiritual worship of God. Pleasant as the cool water brooks are to a thirsty hart, so pleasant is it for the soul to live in communion with God. (2) Rutherford wrote to his friend from the prison of Aberdeen, "The king dineth with his prisoners, and his spikenard casteth a smell; he hath led me to such a pitch and degree of joyful communion with himself as I never before knew." This reminds us of Trapp's quaint speech, that a good Christian is ever praying or praising: he drives a constant trade betwixt earth and heaven. (3) Abram built his altar while the Canaanites looked on. He lifted up a testimony for God, and God honoured him; so that Abimelech was constrained to say, "God is with thee in all that thou doest." Reader, in Greenland, the salutation of a visitor, when the door is opened, is this, "Is God in this house?" Remember that the home which has no family altar has no Divine delight.

> "'Tis that which makes my treasure,
> 'Tis that which brings my gain;
> Converting woe to pleasure,
> And reaping joy for pain."—*Guyon.*

Untimely Contention! Ver. 7. It was untimely contention when Monarchists and Republicans in France disputed with each other, while the German Armies were hemming them in on all sides. It was untimely contention when Luther and Zwingle disputed together, while the Roman hosts were assailing the newly-erected structure of the Reformation. It was untimely contention when Liberals and Conservatives disputed amongst themselves, while the Russian hordes were advancing on Constantinople, and intriguing with Affghanistan. It was untimely contention between Judah and Israel, when the Syrian and Assyrian powers were watching for an opportunity of attack and conquest. It was untimely contention between French and English Canadians, when Indians were on alert to lay waste homes and settlements with fire and sword. And so it was untimely contention between the servants of Lot and Abraham, when surrounded by heathen tribes:—to let their angry passions rise—

> "Like high fed horses, madly breaking loose,
> Bearing down all before them."—*Shakespeare.*

Unseemly Contention! Ver. 8. It was unseemly contention on the part of the two Israelites, whom Moses found striving in the fields, and to whom he said, "Ye are brethren." It was unseemly contention on the part of the disciples, whom Jesus overheard striving which of them should be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. It was unseemly contention on the part of Paul and Barnabas when they separated from each other because of Mark's instability of character. It was unseemly contention when Evangelical Nonconformists and Evangelical Churchmen strove together over £ s. d. considerations. It was unseemly contention when the two Church of England Missionary Societies disagreed as to the evangelisation of Madagascar. And so it was unseemly contention between the servants of Lot and Abraham, seeing they were brethren.

> "Alas! how light a cause may move
> Dissension between friends that love!
> Friends that the world in vain had tried,
> And sorrow but more closely tied."
> —*Moore.*

Unnecessary Contention! Ver. 8. It was unnecessary contention for the Western emigrant to dispute with his neighbour over a narrow strip of land, when whole acres of virgin soil was at the disposal of either or both of them. It was unnecessary contention for the Manx boy to dispute with his sister over the possession of a fig, when a whole box of figs was at the service of either or both of them. It was unnecessary contention for the Hudson hunter to dispute with his fellow-huntsman over the ownership of a fox skin, when the Indians had placed at their disposal a bundle of skins of equal value. It was unnecessary contention for the Kentish mother to dispute with her sister as to which of them should inherit their father's *araucaria*, seeing there were two of them of like growth and grace, vigour and verdure. And so Abram says that it was quite unnecessary to have any quarrel over land and water in Shechem, inasmuch as both Lot and he had their choice of all the fields and wells of Palestine:—

> "From Egypt's river to the north,
> Where, like a glory, the broad sun
> Hangs over sainted Lebanon;
> Whose head in wint'ry grandeur towers,
> And whitens with eternal state;
> While summer, in a vale of flowers,
> Lies sleeping rosy at our feet."

Avoid Contention! Ver. 8. We say that it takes two to make a quarrel; and he who will not quarrel has the best of his adversary. Saul was anxious to pick a quarrel with David, but in vain. We all know who came off best in the end. Gotthold quaintly says, "*It* is not disgraceful to step aside when a great stone is rolling down the hill up which you are climbing, and let it rush past." He who provokes a quarrel sets the stone rolling, and he who steps aside to avoid it does not disgrace himself by so doing. When the Indian hurled his tomahawk unexpectedly in a moment of passion against the white man's breast, the surrounding red and white men did not think their white friend had incurred disgrace as, with astonishing agility, he stepped aside, caught the shining knife by its haft as it passed, and hurled it into the lake on whose borders they were standing. Abraham was no coward in disgrace when he avoided the contention as unseemly, untimely, and unnecessary.

> "Where two dispute, if the one's anger rise,
> The man who lets the contest fall is wise."
> *Plutarch.*

Christian Contention! Ver. 9. Fontaigne says that religious contention is the devil's harvest. And this is true, where the contention is unseemly, untimely, and unnecessary

But all religious contention is not the devil's harvest. To contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints is not doing Satan's work; but the contrary. (1) To contend against the pirate seeking to plunder the English merchantman is not doing the pirate's work. To contend against the adversary who is eagerly endeavouring to sow tares in my wheat field is not doing the adversary's work. To contend against the wolf, which, arrayed in sheep's clothing, is seeking to enter in to the sheep-fold where the lambs are bleating safely, is not doing the wolf's work. (2) When Noah, the preacher of righteousness, contended against his ungodly contemporaries, he was doing God's work. When Jeremiah, the melancholy seer of Jerusalem's overthrow, contended against the hireling shepherds of Jehoiakim's reign, he was doing God's work. When Paul withstood Peter at Antioch on the theme of circumcision, when John contended against prating Diotrephes, when Athanasius maintained the truth against Pelagius, when Cranmer and Luther struggled in conflict with the papal priests and princes, they were doing God's work. (3) Only the contention must be conducted in method and manner, by mean and medium, with precept and principle, strictly Christian. There is, however, a happy contention. Lord Bacon says it is when churches and Christians contend, as the vine and olive, which of them shall bring forth the sweetest fruit to God's glory; not as the briar and thistle, which of them shall bear the sharpest thorns.

"Then every branch which from them springs,
In sacred beauty spreading wide,
As low it bends to bless the earth,
Shall plant another by its side."

Unselfishness! Ver. 9. (1) Two squatters, uncle and nephew, with their waggons and servants, were travelling in the Far West, in search of a new home. Suddenly they came upon a small but lonely savannah, through whose midst flowed a silver-threaded stream. The servants of the two soon proceeded from words to blows in disputing the possession. The uncle, in a generous disinterested spirit, gave his nephew the choice, and offered to take the adjoining portion of country, of a more wooded character. (2) Two sons were left the sovereignty of an eastern kingdom by their father. The princely supporters of each disagreed on the division of the country, whereupon the elder, who could rightly have claimed the first choice, waived his right of primogeniture in favour of his younger brother. Less magnanimous than his brother, the younger prince chose the fairest and most prosperous half of the royal territory. (3) When the herdsmen of Abram and Lot disputed over the wells of water it was Lot's duty to have said to his uncle Abram, "Take the richest land, the fairest pastures, the purest water-springs, and I will seek a home elsewhere." It was left to Abram to display the banner of unselfishness and generosity. So Abram travelled westward, while Lot went down towards the east, to live in the fair vale of Siddim.

"The truly generous is the truly wise;
And he who loves not others lives unblest."
—*Home.*

Lot's Survey! Ver. 10, etc. (1) Apparently the two patriarchs stood on a lofty summit, from which a wide survey could be obtained. To the east, says Stanley, would rise in the foreground the jagged range of the hills above Jericho, and in the distance the dark wall of Moab. Between them would lie the Valley of the Jordan, its course marked by the tract of forest in which its rushing stream is enveloped. Down to this valley would be a long and deep ravine, the main line of communication by which it is approached from the central hills of Palestine—a ravine rich with wine, olive, and fig. In the south and west Lot's view would command a survey of the bleak hills of Judea, varied by the heights crowned with what were afterwards the cities of Benjamin. (2) An American writer, anxious to give a local impression of Lot's prospect, says that it was like standing at the Catskill Mountain House, and looking down through a broad cleft in the hills to the Hudson Valley below. But there is one element to be introduced into the calculation, viz., the remarkable transparency of the Syrian sky. In that country the air is so exceedingly clear, the light so very bright, and the atmosphere is so free from vapours that the optic vision pierces a great distance with absolute ease. Thus Lot could see the whole country, as Moses afterwards did from Mount Pizgah.

"To Lot, who look'd from upper air,
O'er all th' enchanted regions there,
How beauteous must have been the glow,
The life, the sparkling far below."—*Moore.*

Lot Leaving! Ver. 11. (1) Of some of those who followed the Master whithersoever He went up and down Judea and Galilee, we know that it is written, they left Him, and went their way. It was with sad heart that the Apostle of the Gentiles announced the lapse of one of His chosen companions: "Demas hath forsaken me—having loved this present world." And it was with tear-filled eye that one of Europe's noble Reformers told to his flock that his trusted fellow-soldier had yielded to the attractions of wealth. (2) Lot's first days were bright with hope, as the near kinsman of Abram. Together they left Chaldea,—entered Canaan. But though the school of piety, in which he was trained, was most pure, Lot went astray. Caring only about this world's wealth, Lot sees the lovely plains of Sodom, and decides to go away. Of him, the patriarch might sadly whisper to his own heart, "Lot hath forsaken me, having loved this present world."

"Seek not the world!
'Tis a vain show at best;
Bow not before its idol shrine; in God
Find thou thy joy and rest."—*Bonar.*

Lot's Lot! Ver. 12. (1) A rough shell may hold a pearl, remarks Law. There may be silver amongst much dross. Life may exist within the stem, when leaves are seared and branches dry. The spring may yet be deep, while waters trickle scantily. A spark may live beneath much rubbish. (2) So many heirs of glory live ingloriously. Heaven is their purchased rest, but their footsteps seem to be downward. In their hearts there is incorruptible seed, but sorry weeds are intermixed. They are translated into the kingdom of grace, but still the flesh is weak. (3) Such is the gloomy preface to Lot's story. Yet the Holy Spirit, who by the pen of Moses records his tottering walk, by Peter's lips announces him as "just." Thrice in short compass, a glorious title enshrines him among the saved. The voice of truth proclaims him righteous: 2 Peter ii. 7.

"For his clothing is the Sun—
The bright Sun of Righteousness;
He hath put salvation on—
Jesus is his beauteous dress."—*Wesley.*

Godless Gain! Ver. 13. (1) A godly man in a rural village in Suffolk, where for generations the people had been highly favoured with a succession of earnest "winners of souls" to Christ, tempted by the offer of higher wages and greater scope in London, left his home and took up his residence in an ungodly neighbourhood in the East-end. But the higher wages and greater scope were very quickly outweighed by the corruption of his children, etc. (2) Even religious men, says Robertson, sometimes settle in a foreign country, notoriously licentious, merely that they may increase their wealth. But very soon they find to their cost that God has terrible modes of retribution. In the choice of homes, of friends, and in alliances, he who selects according to the desires of the flesh lays up in store for himself many troubles and anxieties. Such was Lot's experience. (3) How frequently, remarks Blunt, have men found that their greatest disquietudes and troubles have been the fruits of their own selfish selectings. Often that "vale of Siddim," which they have most anxiously coveted, has been the wellspring from whence has flowed the bitter waters of sorrow and distress. Far better, if God tries us by putting a blank paper into our hands, to fill in our free choice, humbly refer the choice back to Him and say,

"Thy way, not mine, O Lord,
However dark it be;
Lead me by Thine own hand,
Choose out the path for me."
—*Bonar.*

God's Gift! Ver. 14. (1) It was a season of depression. One by one she had lost husband and children, save the youngest. Fondly had she nursed and nurtured him. Prayerfully had she trained and tended him. For years he had been her companion, and now earth's last link was broken. When budding into manhood he had been suddenly taken from her side into the eternal world. A sense of unutterable loneliness was creeping over her heart. One friend—one friend only—had she in the world; but that one friend was a friend indeed. Hastening to the desolate home, she ministered to the lonely and depressed heart—with almost angelic skill and sweetness winning back that heart to sweetness and cheerfulness. (2) It was a time of depression to Abraham. Separated from country and kindred, he had but one link left to him of the chain of Mesopotamian associations. Now it had been snapped. Lot had gone forth to the plain of Sodom, and Abraham was alone. Sitting on the summit beside his altar and tent, beneath the shadow of Moreh's wide spreading oak, Abraham prays for strength. One friend—one friend only—had he in the world; but that friend was a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Jehovah-Jesus, whether in human form visibly or only to the inner consciousness we know not, appears, and ministers to him "God's Gift!"

"Thou whisperest some pleasant word,
I catch the much-loved tone;
I feel Thee near, my gracious Lord,
I know Thou keepest watch and ward,
And all my grief is gone."
—*Anon.*

Godliness Gain! Ver. 14, etc. A philosopher, on being pressed to embrace the promises of the Gospel, demurred on the ground that by professing Christ he would lose friends and fields. A Christian thereupon offered to give him on the spot a bond of security against all losses which he might incur by yielding to the Holy Spirit, and accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as all his salvation and all his desire. Thus fortified against contingencies, the philosopher embraced Christianity, erected an altar in his family circle, and proclaimed himself a follower and servant of God. Years passed by, and the hour of the philosopher's departure for the eternal world drew near. Conscious that his days were numbered, he sent for the Christian, who had given him the bond, and tearing the paper in pieces, he died saying, "There is nothing for you to pay; for the Lord Jesus has made up to me an hundredfold for all I have ever suffered on His account."

"For men, scanning the surface, count the wicked happy,
Nor heed the compensating bliss which gladdeneth the good in his afflictions."
—*Tupper.*

Christian Compensation! Ver. 14, etc. Abram, walking by faith, receives the promise of an eternal inheritance—compensating for his self-sacrifice of worldly interest in favour of Lot. This is the third occasion of Messiah's appearance to him; but it is the first time we find explicit mention made of what he himself is ultimately to possess. At the first interview came the Gospel privilege of free justification, on the faith of which Abram starts on pilgrimage. On the second occasion, the patriarch is briefly told that the earthly Canaan is to be the portion of his natural posterity. But on this third manifestation of Himself the Lord Jesus favours Abram with a fuller and more express communication. He is to be "infefted" in the land, says Candlish. He is to take a survey of it—to make a measurement of it—to assume investiture in the lordship of it: "It is thine: to thee I give it." Yet it was not mere walking by sight over the earthly fields and pastures of Canaan, to which Abram was directed. He was to walk by *faith* up and down the heavenly plains and waters of Paradise, in the blessed hope and full assurance, of the resurrection of himself and his spiritual children to glory, and their full enjoyment of the everlasting inheritance of the saints in light. He was to survey—

"From every mountain's rugged peak,
The blessed land of rest;
And from its fields of fadeless bloom
Feel zephyrs laden with perfume,
Cheering his pilgrim breast."

Abram's Seed! Ver. 16. Sitting one Sunday afternoon in the cosy parlour, warmed pleasantly by the winter's fire, were mother and two children. Before them was *Bible Pictures and Poems*. It lay open at Gen. xiii., and the conversation flowed upon Abram and his little plot of land known as Palestine. The mother had just read ver. 16, when she was interrupted by her girl inquiring, in child-like curiosity, "Did Abram have so many children as that?" Speaking for the mother, it is well to notice that the prophecies of the Bible often have two or more meanings. This promise was true in two ways—(1) after the flesh; (2) after the spirit. (1) Literally after the flesh there never lived a man, since the days of the heads of the human race, whose children made so many nations as those of Abraham. Limiting the promise even to Isaac, look around over the ages and countries of Christendom alone, and see what myriads upon myriads of children Isaac had. (2) Metaphorically, after the spirit, there never lived a man whose children were so numerous. Christians—whether Jewish or Gentile converts—are the children of Abram according to the promise. If we be Christ's, says St. Paul, then are we Abram's seed and heirs according to the promise. Abram's seed during all the Christian centuries are to come from all Christian countries and sit down with him in the heavenly country.

"Now, o'er whose acres walk those blessed feet,
Which eighteen hundred years ago were nailed
For our advantage to earth's bitter cross!"

Divine Duty! Ver. 17. (1) Two men stood on a lofty slope in the West of England from which an extensive prospect of woodland and waterland presented itself. It was a charming scene, and the brilliant early summer sunshine added to the charm. The elder of the two was a wealthy merchant prince, who, wandering over seas and lands, had amassed wealth, and purchased the estates around. The lines on his face, the furrows on his brow, the far-away look in his eye, and the silver snows on his head, told that his pilgrimage could not be long. The younger one is his son, to whom he is saying, "Look around, these are thine; to thee and thy children I give them; go forth and survey them to thy heart's content, as their future, rightful owner." And the young man, with grateful heart, went hither and thither. (2) So with Abram. He was to arise and walk through the length and breadth of the land. When the Lord Jesus appeared to him beneath the giant oak of Moreh, Abram was able to look round and behold a wonderful country, wonderful in its fairness, fertility, and figuration. That country was God's gift to him and to his children; and, as its rightful proprietor, he was to walk up and down in it, even as the squire, or nobleman, or prince surveys his wide domains from north to south, and east to west. Yet, after all, that land was itself a figure, and the gift itself a figure. To Abraham and his seed after the spirit was to be given a better country—the wide fair fields and fruits of Gospel grace, the vast rich dells and dales of moral blessing.

"Arrayed in beauteous green,
Its hills and valleys shine,
And to it Abraham is led
By Providence Divine."
—*Doddridge.*

Hebron-Heights! Ver. 18. (1) It lies higher than any other city in Syria, wanting as it does but 500 feet of being as high as the snowclad summit of Snowdon in Wales. Thus, while it is far south and near the hot, dry desert airs, it is a region of refreshing coolness. Coming from Egypt towards Hebron, it certainly looks a lovely place. It lies in a long, narrow valley, full of vineyards and fruit-trees and gardens, with grey olive groves on the slope of the hills. The city was at the southern end of the valley; and near it, in Abram's day, was a grove of oaks belonging to one of the Canaanite inhabitants. (2) Abram had before pitched his pilgrim-tent under the towering trunk of Moreh's oak—now he does so again. It may sound strange to us that Abram could thus enter and take possession of land so near a mighty city as Hebron. But at the present day, a Bedaween sheikh will bring his tribe and flocks into the immediate vicinity of a Syrian town, and make his pilgrim-home there for a time. Even in our own country, centuries ago, the Egyptian gipsies were free to enter upon lands, and pitch their moving tents or trucks near townships. (3) Abram was a wealthy chieftain, with a tribal band of servants and followers, whose tents were scattered over the table-land above the valley of Hebron. His immense flocks and herds wandered over all the hill-sides, cropping the sweet wild thyme and browsing on the pastures which abounded there. The people of Hebron dealt more in mercantile pursuits; so that they were less likely to resent Abram's appearance.

By gentle rivers of refreshment oft
Abram wandering was led; and borne aloft
In arms that failed him not, still fondly watched
From hidden dangers and destruction snatched.

Abram's Oak! Ver. 18. (1) Josephus, the Jewish historian, says that in his day "Abram's Oak" stood. It is certain that an oak did stand about two miles from Hebron, on the undulating table land which stretches off from the top of the valley; but it is doubtful whether it really was the oak in Moreh. Under that tree Arabs, Jews, and Christians used to hold a fair every summer, and honour the tree by hanging their different pictures and images on it. The Emperor Constantine destroyed these symbols of tree-worship, but left the tree standing. It has long since gone. (2) At the present day another oak is called "Abram's oak," but this cannot be more than one thousand years old. It is, however, a fine old tree, its branches giving a shadow ninety feet in diameter. It stands some distance up the valley, with nice clean grass underneath, and a well of water near. English and American tourists picnic beneath its shadow. Out of the joints of the stones there are the prettiest dainty little ferns growing.

"He sat him down beneath this tree, whose
branches spread so fair,
And many a weary traveller found rest and
refreshment there;
He showed the fount that flowed below, and
parched lips on him smiled;
Men journeyed on and mutely blessed the
patriarch of the wild."—*Shipton.*

Abram! Ver. 18. The patriarch had his feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, and for an helmet the hope of salvation. Those who are his seed should imitate their father, by putting on what he has bequeathed as the family heir-looms, viz., the greaves and headpiece. The gospel of peace will prepare the children's feet as it prepared the father's, for walking as strangers, warring as soldiers, and suffering as pilgrims on earth. The hope of salvation will guard the children's heads, as it guarded their father's head from the assaults of the enemy. Raised erect above the smoke and din of this earthly scene, Abram's children, by faith in Christ Jesus, should fix their steadfast and ever-brightening gaze on the glory to be revealed, looking for that city which hath foundations, their inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

"When the shaded pilgrim-land
Fades before the closing eye,
Then, revealed on either hand,
Heaven's own scenery shall lie;
Then the veil of flesh shall fall,
Now concealing, darkening all."
—*Lange.*

CHAPTER XIV.

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. Arioch.] Probably signifies *lion-like*. The name re-appears in the time of Daniel, as applied to the captain of the king's guard (Dan. ii. 14).—Chedorlaomer.] "Upon the bricks recently found in Chaldea there occurs the name of a king—*Kudurmapula*—which *Rawlinson* thinks may be the same, and especially as he is further distinguished by the title of '*Ravager of the West.*' The latter part of the name—*laomer*—presents the difficulty; but this may be the Semitic translation of the original Hamite term *Mapula*" (*Jacobus*).—Tidal king of nations.] Probably chief of a number of nomadic tribes to whom no special territory could be assigned, since they changed their place according to the seasons of the year. Some regard the word *nations* as of special significance, as bringing to mind the expression "Galilee of the nations" (Matt. iv. 15; Isa. ix. 1).—2. That these made war.] After the confusion of tongues, Shinar was the central region from which the different branches of the human family spread; and it would naturally claim supremacy over the other colonies. It was the great commercial centre, being on the highway to the riches of the Nile.—3. Vale of Siddim, which is the Salt Sea.] The vale was afterwards submerged by the Salt Sea when the Lord destroyed the Cities of the Plain. The words were probably added to the ancient document by way of explanation.—5. Rephaims.] (Sept. the giants). "These were in Ashteroth Kamaim—the principal town, dedicated to the *horned Ashteroth*, as the term imports. This is a trace of the idolatry prevalent east of the Jordan. The original *Astarte* (goddess) was figured with the head of a cow, having a globe between the horns" (*Jacobus*). Their country is identified with that of Bashan, whose last king was Og, so famous for his stature.—9. The names are repeated, and attention is drawn to the fact that there were *four kings* in battle *with five*.—10. Full of slime-pits.] The word "pits" is doubled in the Heb. to convey the idea of a great number. The vale was full of places from which bitumen oozed out of the ground, and would therefore be inconvenient and dangerous for the purposes of warfare. Many of the fugitives, in the hurry of their flight, would fall into these pits and perish.—Fled to the mountain.] Probably the mountain heights on the east of the dale.—13. Abram the Hebrew.] The lxx. renders the word by *περάτης one passing over, i.e., the immigrant*, and some say that Abram is so described as having crossed the Euphrates from the east. But *Murphy* considers that the word should be understood as a patronymic, because in every other place the word is always used in this sense, and it might be said of every other tribe that they had originally migrated across the Euphrates. "And moreover Abram is distinguished as the Hebrew, just as his confederate Mamre is distinguished as the Amorite. 'The Sons of Heber' are distinctly mentioned in the table of nations among the descendants of Shem."—Mamre.] This was near the seat of war. Confederate] Heb. "Lords of the earth (or covenant) of Abram." They were in league together for mutual defence.—14. His brother] In the wider sense of a near relative. *Trained servants born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen.* This would represent a domestic following of upwards of one thousand men, women, and children.—15 And he divided himself against them] He divided his forces into two portions so as to attack the enemy on two different quarters. *Hobah on the left hand of Damascus.* The Hebrews supposed the face to be turned towards the rising sun, and named the points of the compass accordingly. Hence, Hobah would lie to the north of Damascus. "The Jews regard the village of *Jobar*, a few miles N.E. of Damascus, as answering to Hobah. At Burzeh, very near, is a spot held in veneration by the people as having been the 'praying place' of Abraham, where he returned thanks to God after the discomfiture of the kings." *(Alford)*—17. Valley of Shaveh] Shaveh means valley or dale. Nothing is known of its situation.—18. Melchizedek, King of Righteousness] The Jews identify him with Shem. Thus the Targum of Jonathan: "But Melchizedek he is Shem, the son of Noah, king of Jerusalem." Also the Jerusalem Targum: "But Melchizedek, king of Jerusalam, he is Shem, who was the great priest of the Most High." This statement is manifestly absurd, for the genealogy of Shem is clearly given in the Scriptures. The priesthood of Shem would not be of a different order from Levi's, whereas in Heb. vii. 6, the contrary is asserted. "His person, his office, his relation to Christ, and the seat of his sovereignty, have given rise to innumerable discussions, which even now can scarcely be considered as settled." *(Bullock, Bible Dict.)* "Everything combines to show that Melchizedek was a Canaanitish king who had retained the worship of the true God, and combined in his own person the offices of king and priest." *(Alford.)*—King of Salem] "King of *peace*." (Heb. vii. 2.) It is doubtful whether this refers to the place afterwards called Jerusalem. Most probably *Salem* is to be understood in its strict sense as part of the title.—Most High God] Heb. *El Elyon*. This name of God occurs here for the first time. *El* signifies strength. "Hence we perceive that the unity, the omnipotence, and the absolute pre-eminence of God were still living in the memory and conscience of a section at least of the inhabitants of this land." *(Murphy)*—22. I have lifted up mine hand] This is a Hebraism for "I have sworn." The custom was to raise the right hand when taking an oath.—23. From a thread even to a shoe-latchet] A proverbial expression, signifying that he would not take even a thing of the most trivial value.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—12.

The First War on Record.

From the character of some of the nations into which the earth was divided after the flood, we may reasonably suppose that there were wars before the time to which we are introduced by this chapter. But this is the first war of which we have any record, and it will be found in its chief features to be much like all other wars. The worst passions of mankind break out in the same disastrous manner from age to age. This first war of history may be compared with all the rest which have followed, at least in its chief characteristics.

I. As to its motives. Human conduct is determined by motives, and to such an extent that some have been led to question whether man's will is really free. It is said that his life is moulded by the moral circumstances in which he is placed. And it must be admitted that such is the power of evil in the world that most men yield themselves helplessly to its influence. They seem to lack that self-determining power which would set them free to do good and secure the fruits of righteousness. In the constant recurrence of some of the chief evils which afflict society we see the operation of a kind of fate or necessity. Such is the moral condition of human nature, and the strength of temptation, and the conflict of interests, that wars and fightings must needs be. This war against the invaders of the land was prompted by the same motives which have since that early age given rise to many wars. 1. *Ambition.* There is reason to believe that it was *that* sin which broke the peace of heaven. St. Paul warns his son Timothy against placing a novice in the office of a bishop, "lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Tim. iii. 6). The sin of Lucifer was the sin of ambition: "Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . . I will be like the Most High" (Isa. xiv. 13, 14). This sin has been one of the most fruitful sources of wars amongst mankind. Destruction and misery are in its ways. Here we have Chedarlaomer, who was probably one of the early kings of the Persian dynasty, allying himself with the most powerful monarchs of his time. He had already obtained an ascendancy over the most powerful peoples of the east, and his ambition still urges him to extensive conquest. He inspires the same purpose in the breasts of other rulers, making them but his instruments to promote himself to universal dominion. This lust of conquest has produced the most terrible wars that have ever afflicted mankind. The history of the world has but repeated the battle of the "four kings with five" (ver. 9). Another motive is—2. *Plunder.* This is a baser motive than the former, for it appeals to the worst elements of human nature. Ambition is a choice temptation, and the man who possesses it, if his feeling takes a right direction, is capable of great and noble deeds. But the impulse of plunder is a meaner thing. This has been almost the sole object of many wars, chiefly those between the lowest nations. The "Cities of the Plain" rose in the midst of beautiful scenery, in lands well-watered and of remarkable fertility. The inhabitants grew rich under the favours of nature. Such prosperity would be a temptation to the rapacity of the surrounding nations. There were spoils to be had. War, as it often breaks the sixth, so it often breaks the eighth commandment on a large scale. Men who are severe on individual acts of sin are indulgent to the sins of nations. The morality of war has too often been defended upon the principle, be monstrous, and you are acceptable. Like the Cities of the Plain, the lavish gifts of nature upon many nations have only invited the plunderers. And so it must be until the covetousness of human nature is overcome by the universal diffusion of the religion of the Prince of Peace. Another motive often leading to war is—3. *The desire to recover lost sovereignty.* Chedarlaomer held undisputed sway, for the space of twelve years, over the petty princes who ruled the nations occupying the fruitful plain of Jordan. In the thirteenth year they rebelled; and as in that rude age it was difficult for a conqueror to keep in subjection the remote provinces of his empire, they succeeded in gaining their independence. (Verse 4). But it was necessary to avenge the revolt, and therefore this warlike expedition into Canaan was organised. The restless ambition of kings cannot long bear the loss of a sovereignty which they had won by the power of arms. Brute force can never bring about a brotherhood of men. What the sword has won, the sword must keep. War can never bring about a state of permanent peace. Revenge for wrongs inflicted fills the breasts of the vanquished, and only waits the opportunity to break out in rebellion. Hence conquerors have to subdue the same people again and again. One war renders another necessary, and thus this terrible scourge of mankind is perpetuated. Again, this first war recorded in history may be compared with the rest—

II. As to the conditions of its success. In all wars men have made use of similar arts and strategy. They have aimed to take advantage of every circumstance which seemed favourable. From the failure of human foresight, and the endless complications of events, it may happen that the battle is not always to the strong; still there are general conditions of success. Some of these may be seen in the instance before us. Means were used which had a tendency to secure the desired end. 1. *By depriving the enemy of all friendly help.* When Chedorlaomer started on his expedition into Canaan he swept along the verge of the wilderness, in order to cut off the supplies of the five kings, and to bring into subjection the surrounding people to whom the rebels might have looked for help (verses 5-7). Thus the Cities of the Plain, deprived of the aid of surrounding tribes, would fall an easy prey. Conquerors have often used this stratagem. War tramples ruthlessly upon all the rights of man, and regards every device as lawful that will secure success. 2. *By favourable physical conditions.* The country was "full of slime pits," dug for the supply of mortar for building (verse 10). These were filled with a pitchy substance, forming a trap for the retreating foe. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fell there with many of their people, and only a few escaped to the mountains. Thus the conqueror was favoured by the external features of the land. War presses every circumstance into its service. Nature is quite indifferent as to the side on which the cause of justice lies. 3. *By moral causes.* The inhabitants of the Cities of the Plain were corrupted by those vices which often accompany prosperity. They grew luxurious and effeminate—the victims of self-indulgence. Such men would be lacking in the higher qualities of manly courage and patriotism, and would fall an easy prey to the enemy. Luxury robbed them of all spirit and energy. The fall of ancient Rome was not due alone to the strength of her enemies, but to that luxury which enervated her citizens. Moral causes often contribute to the victories of war, and the conqueror becomes the rod of God punishing nations for a long course of sin. This war may also be compared with others—

III. As to its results. Like many other wars, the consequences of this were most disastrous to the interests of mankind. The usual train of evils followed, but there are two which are specially to be observed in this instance. 1. *That men often suffer who take no part in the quarrel.* It does not appear that Lot mixed himself up with the political and military affairs of Sodom. He probably avoided coming into too close relations with that depraved community. The narrative seems to imply that he was not personally implicated in the quarrel. But he had to take his share in the sad issues of the battle. The enemy made no distinctions. No favour was shown to the man of God. He who was righteous in his generation had to share the evil fortunes of the rest. In all wars many must suffer who have contributed nothing towards them, and who have even studied the things that make for peace. A man must accept the conditions of society, however he may lament or strive to improve them. In this, as in many other human evils, "one event happeneth unto all." 2. *That the vanquished do not always benefit by the discipline of adversity.* The men of Sodom and Gomorrah did not learn wisdom by this calamity, but continued in their wickedness until by a severer judgment they were doomed to destruction. Many nations have failed to learn the lessons of God's judgments in the scourge of war.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES

Verse 1. As the countries about the Euphrates and Tigris were that part of the world where the sons of Noah began to settle after leaving the ark, it was there that population and power would first naturally accumulate, and lead to the establishment of despotic governments. The families and tribes emigrating from these regions would be considered in the light of colonies which ought to be subject to the parent state. Such, it appears probable, were the ideas of the four eastern kings here mentioned, and we may suppose that it was with a view of enforcing this subjection, which after having been twelve years acknowledged, was at length thrown off, that the present invasion was planned. In what relation the four kings had previously stood to each other is uncertain; but they now combined as allies, and marched with their forces, which we have no reason to think were very large, to the land of Canaan.—*(Bush.)*

The ambition of kings has often disturbed the peace of the Church.

How often has the history of kings been a sad record of thrones won and maintained by violence, oppression, and cruel deeds of blood!

Verse 2. One of the terrible results of the Fall is that men waste most of their talent and energy in neutralizing each other. Such a wretched waste of power is a folly which only the complete setting up of the kingdom of God can banish from the world.

This is the first war expressly recorded in the annals of the human race, and it is evident that it sprung from the same cause that has given rise to the thousands of wars which from that day to this have wasted the family of man, and drenched the earth in blood—vain-glorious pride and grasping ambition. Nor can we hope for a cessation of the barbarous practice till the general prevalence of Christianity, in the power of its peaceful spirit, shall have extinguished the flames of these unhallowed passions, and taught them to regard each other as brethren who cannot, if they conceived aright of their mutual interests, have any conflicting object that should drive them to deeds of violence.—*(Bush.)*

The people of the Cities of the Plain were visited by the rod of God in this terrible scourge of war. Had they humbled themselves in repentance towards God, they might have escaped the second and severer judgment.

The first invasion of calamity is a signal for us to examine ourselves and to turn to God while we have time, lest a worse evil come upon us.

Verse 3. Self-defence—the only justifiable ground for engaging in war. How few wars can be justified on this plea!

A common calamity has power to unite men. If they were wise they would learn the secret of a deeper and more permanent union.

No principle of selfishness can ever bring about a real and abiding brotherhood amongst mankind. A nation of brothers in the participation of one spiritual life is the only strong nation.

Verse 4. The assertion of authority and rule by means of force can never hold men long together. Thus one war necessitates another.

Unjust and oppressive governments provoke rebellion. Human endurance has its breaking strain when it can hold out no longer, but becomes desperate.

It is not said in the narrative that they were wrong; and it is by no means clear that they were. Rebellion may be right. It is so if the government be unjust and oppressive, and there is good reason to believe that success will attend their efforts to shake off the yoke of bondage.—*(Dr. Gorman, in Lange's Genesis.)*

Verse 5, 6. The Rephaim lay in Peraea. Some of them also were once found on the west side of the Jordan (Gen. xv. 20), where they gave name to the valley of Rephaim. They were a tall or gigantic race. The Zuzim dwelt between the Jabbok and the Arnon. The Emim were also accounted Rephaim. They lay on the east of the Salt Sea, and were afterwards conquered by the Moabites, who gave them this name (Deut. ii. 10, 11). Of Shaveh Kiriathaim, the plain of the two cities, the name probably remains in El-Kureiyât, a site near Jebel Attarus in Moab. *(Murphy).*

Verse 7. They turned about after smiting the people above mentioned, and, taking a northerly direction, entered the valley of the Jordan, and attacked the inhabitants of the plain. En-mishpat, *i.e.*, fountain of judgment, is so called by anticipation. This name was conferred in consequence of the circumstance recorded Num. xx. 10, where God gave *judgment* or *sentence* against Moses and Aaron for their offence thus committed. *All the country* of the Amalekites—Heb. "All the field of the Amalekite." This also by anticipation, as Amalek was not yet born (Gen. xxxvi. 10, 11). Understand it of the country afterwards occupied by the Amalekites. The sacred writer speaks of places by the names most familiar in his own times. —*(Bush).*

The invaders pressed on to *Hazezon-tamer*, cutting of the palms—which is Engedi (2 Chron. xx. 2), on or near the western shore of the Dead Sea, a settlement of the Amorites, who were the most powerful tribe of Canaan. This was always an important point, because behind it was the celebrated pass to Jerusalem, called Ziz (2 Chron. xx. 16).—*(Jacobus).*

War spreads destruction all along its course. Ambition disregards the laws of natural justice.

Verse 8. We have now arrived at the point we had reached in verse 3. The five kings came out, and joined battle with the four in the vale of Siddim.—*(Murphy.)*

Many places of little importance in themselves are regarded with surpassing interest, because they have been the scenes of great battles.

How true it is that man marks the earth with ruin! The earth bears traces of the destructive power of evil.

In the place of battle God is often forgotten; justice is outraged, the worst passions of mankind are let loose, and men assume the character of fiends.

By this time Abram's neighbours, the kings of Sodom, Admah, Zeboim, and Bela, must have been not a little alarmed. They and their people, however, determine to fight, and fight they did.—*(Fuller.)*

Verses 9, 10.—**The fate of war is not always decided by the justice of** the cause. Where brute force rules, the triumph of the right can be only an accident.

The natural features of a country are often made to serve the interests of men bent upon designs of wholesale slaughter. Thus, Nature's gifts are bestowed upon all, without respect to moral character.

They that remained fled to the mountains eastward, which run through the territory of the Moabites. Thus the five kings were utterly routed. The disaster which befel the two most powerful of them—falling into the pits—produced a panic, as would seem, among the remainder, resulting in their flight. The invaders advanced now from the westward flank, and thus cut off their escape from the mountains of Judah.—*(Jacobus.)*

It is still a common practice in the East for the inhabitants of towns and villages to hasten for safety to the mountains in times of alarm and danger, or, at least, to send their valuable property away. The moveables of the Asiatics, in camps, villages, and towns, are astonishingly few compared with those which the refinements of European life render necessary. A few carpets, kettles, and dishes of tinned copper, compose the bulk of their property, which can speedily be packed up, and sent away on the backs of camels or mules, with the women and children mounted on the baggage. In this way a large village or town is in a few hours completely gutted, and the inhabitants, with every stick and rag belonging to them, can place themselves in safety in the mountains.—*(Pict. Bib.)*

Verse 11. "Fulness of bread" was part of their sin (Ez. xvi. 49); and now "cleanness of teeth" is made a part of their punishment.—*(Trapp).*

Those things by which men have sinned are often the marks at which God's judgments are aimed.

Temporal prosperity excites the covetousness of mankind, and has thus been the occasion of many sins.

Every kind of iniquity follows in

the train of war. All the rights of man are violated.

Verse 12. Here we have a graver evil than the taking of spoils—the robbery of the *persons* of men. This is the sin which has led to all the horrors of slavery.

Lot, the man of God, would have his portion with the wicked in their prosperity, and now he must share in their calamities.

The worldly choice which Lot made was calculated to teach him solemn lessons. 1. The corrupting influence of evil associations. 2. That even a righteous man who chooses to live among a depraved community is liable to suffer from the evils which fall upon them, and even though his own conduct has not contributed to those evils. 3. That men are often brought under obligation to those whose interests they have selfishly disregarded. Lot had not behaved rightly to the generous spirit of Abraham, and now he becomes a candidate for his pity and help. The fortunes of life are too uncertain to render it safe for a man to treat his friend ungenerously.

The conquerors take all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all the victuals; and what few people are left they take for slaves. Among these was Lot, Abram's brother's son, his friend, and the companion of his travels, with all their family, and all his goods. And this notwithstanding he was only a sojourner but lately come amongst them, and seems to have taken no part in the war. O Lot, these are the fruits of taking up thy residence in Sodom; or rather the first-fruits of it: the harvest is yet to come!—*(Fuller).*

Even they who are altogether worldly themselves, however blind and indulgent they may be to their own worldly sins, are quick enough to discover, and keen enough to condemn, the sins of the worldly who are opposed to them; and however inoffensive you may really be, if they find you dwelling in Sodom they will not deal with you as in great mercy the Lord at a subsequent crisis dealt with Lot. They will rather do as the four kings did; they will take you where they find you, and deal with you accordingly. They will indiscriminately confound you with those among whom they see you taking refuge, and will not spare you from the obloquy and injury which they pour upon your companions. How careful, therefore, should Christ's people be in shunning all alliance or connection with any section or party of the ungodly world! Whatever may be the explanation, and whatever the object of such an alliance, the truth cannot fail to suffer from its contact with any one of the world's false and wicked ways; and it will be strange indeed, should there be anyone interested in running down the confederacy, if the truth thus entangled in worldly fellowship does not come in for nearly all the blame and loss which the world itself ought to sustain.—*(Candlish).*

That wealth which was the cause of his former quarrels is made a prey to merciless heathens; that place which his eye covetously chose, betrays his life and goods. How many Christians whilst they have looked at gain have lost themselves!—*(Bp. Hall).*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13—16.

ABRAM AS A WARRIOR.

Here Abram appears altogether in a new character. He who was noted for the meekness of his disposition and simple trust in God, now acts the strange part of a warrior. He had shown the heroism of self-sacrifice, and now he shows the heroism of a patriot and a friend. In a private capacity the virtues and graces of his life were such as command esteem; and now, as a public man, vindicating and succouring the oppressed and unfortunate, he displays admirable skill and courage. We may consider Abram as a warrior in a twofold light:—

I. In the cause of man. The lives of good and holy men, which are recorded in the Scriptures, have a double aspect, on the one hand as they regard their fellow-creatures, and on the other as they regard God. He who is promoting the welfare of mankind may at the same time be accomplishing the wider purposes of the Almighty. The conduct of Abram must be interpreted in this double relation—in the light of social facts, and in the light of his high calling of God. One who is closely related to him in blood is in great danger. Moved by natural affection, by brotherly love, he engages in war. One motive which led him to take up arms was the rescue of Lot from the hands of the enemy. From this we learn—1. *The sacredness of natural affection.* The Bible gives no distorted views of life, but accepts the great facts of human nature as they stand revealed to our ordinary observation. It inculcates no laws of conduct which are unpractical or unnatural. It insists upon the propriety and duties of natural affection. The assertion that all men are equal is true within limits, for they are such in the sight of God, and in the main features of their existence and destiny. We ought to love the whole human race. But this equality of affection is interfered with and modified by blood. There are duties which clearly lie nearest to us, and we have the prescription of nature urging us to their performance. A man is bound to love those of his own household with a peculiar affection. Our first impulse is to bless and deliver the brother and the friend. That virtue which professes devotion to humanity at large, while it disregards or thinks lightly of duties towards home and kindred, is not taught in the Bible. Our social love must move in the ways of the Divine order, *i.e.*, it must move from within the domestic circle outwards to the whole human race. The impulse of natural affection was a sufficient justification of Abram's conduct. We learn also—2. *The noble generosity which forgets the faults of friends or kindred in their distress.* Lot had some serious *social faults.* He was narrow-minded, selfish, and lacking in those graces which lend a charm to life and reduce that friction which must arise in the dealings of men with one another. He had behaved ungenerously towards Abram, and had separated from him at a time when his companionship was of importance to the social interests of both. Yet Abram forgets the faults and unkindness of his kinsman when he is in trouble. As a *religious man*, also, Lot was greviously at fault. By his own act he left the family circle of Abram, where so many religious privileges could be enjoyed. He exposed himself to great spiritual peril by dwelling in the midst of a people notorious for their wickedness. Yet Abram does not leave his kinsman to reap the consequences of his own folly, but hastens to render him aid. We have—3. *The heroism which sacrifices self for the benefit of others.* Abram exposed himself to great danger in undertaking so desperate an enterprise; but he thinks not of himself while engaged in the noble cause of rescuing a brother. Others, also, shared in the benefits of his self-sacrificing act (verse 16). But we must consider Abram as a warrior—

II. In the cause of God. The external features of the history show us Abram in the light of a friend delivering his kinsman from the hand of the enemy. But he stood in certain relations to the kingdom of God, and therefore we must read a wider meaning into his conduct on the occasion of this war. Thus the history reveals to us more than appears upon the first view. 1. *His engaging in war cannot be accounted for, except on the supposition that he had a Divine warrant for his conduct.* This is rendered very probable if we reflect that Abram, ever since God called him, ordered all things in his life by faith. He would scarcely have faced the dangers of such an expedition as this, where, humanly speaking, the chances of success were against him, unless he had clearly ascertained the will of God. He was moved by the spirit, not of adventure but of faith. If he had merely obeyed his own feelings, we can hardly suppose that he would afterwards have received so remarkable a blessing. The prophet Isaiah is supposed to refer to Abram's conduct in this war (Isaiah xli. 2, 3), and if such be the reference, it is evidently implied that the patriarch's enterprise had the Divine sanction. "Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to His foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? He gave them as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow. He pursued them, and passed safely; even by the way that he had not gone with his feet." Thus the motives which urged Abram on were not those of a man of the world, but they were derived from a principle of obedience to God, and faith in His promise. Two considerations will show, that he would scarcely have undertaken the mission of a warrior without the Divine sanction and assurance. (1) *As a private individual he would not have the right to wage war.* He was not a chief, invested with power and authority, but a private and unofficial person, and moreover a stranger in the land. What right or title had he then to raise an army, and wage war? Besides, he was subject to other kings and rulers, and it was not likely that so irregular an expedition on his part would be tolerated. Consider—*(2). That his chance of success—to all human appearance—was small.* The males of his own household were but 318, hastily prepared and armed, and with this insignificant force he ventures to pursue an army flushed with victory and commanded by four powerful monarchs! Surely Gideon's exploit in the war with the Midianites was scarcely more desperate. It is easier to believe that in each case the success was miraculous. Like the faith which led to it, this also was the gift of God. Abram derived the right and power by which he acted, not from human expediency but from God. 2. *He wages war as the ruler and proprietor, by Divine right, of the land.* God had promised the land to him. He was the real owner of it, and now exercises his royal prerogative of making war. Though a stranger and a pilgrim he appears for a moment in his true character as a victorious prince. He is permitted by the favour of God to foredate the great blessing which was in store for him. Thus Our Lord, in the days of His humiliation, was seen for awhile on the Mount of Transfiguration, in that glory in which He shall hereafter appear when He comes to reign. Abram acts throughout as the man of faith who was accomplishing the purposes of God, and not following his own private ends. He had an eye to the interests of a larger family than that which was bound to him by the ties of natural relationship, even that family which is the Church of God. When he had asserted his rights and privileges, and delivered his kinsman, he retires into private life again. He refuses to enrich himself with the conquests he had won, for he had that faith in God which does not make haste. His cause was with the Most High.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 13. Among those who fled from the drawn sword and the fearfulness of war, there was one who reached the plain of Mamre, and told the sad tale to Abram. He feels much, but what can he do? Can he raise an army wherewith to spoil the spoilers, and deliver the captives? He will try. Yes, from his regard to Lot, whose late faults would be now forgotten, and his former love recur to mind; and if he succeed, he will not only deliver him but many others. The cause is a just one, and God has promised to *bless Abram and make him a blessing.* Who can tell but he may prove in this instance a blessing to the whole country, by delivering it from the power of a cruel foreign oppressor.—*(Fuller.)*

The fugitive who escaped to tell Abram the sad news was probably an inhabitant of Sodom, but he was the servant of God's providence.

In the greatest calamities which

happen to the Church, God finds a way of deliverance.

Abram and his kinsman represented the Church of God then upon earth. That Church is still one family, united by a common interest, and owning a common Father. One portion of that family cannot suffer without exciting the sympathy and engaging the help of the other.

It is fit that such as sit at ease in their own habitations should hear of the Church's troubles.—(*Hughes.*)

Abram could induce the chiefs of the land to make a covenant with him. Thus the blessings of the Church have overflowed to heathendom.

The Church of God will at last take all the kingdoms of the world into its unity.

Verse 14. Abram thought not of his kinsman's ingratitude, but of his need. He stayed not to weigh his deserts, but obeyed the call of his distress.

To deal with others on the principles of rigid justice would often inflict upon them the greatest injury. If God so dealt with man, none of us should see salvation. The property of mercy and compassion is to flow by the necessity of its own fulness.

Abram armed his trained servants, and hastened to rescue Lot. We must not be content with mere feeling for the miseries of others, but do all that in us lies to bring them succour. Love is not an empty emotion. It delights in giving, blessing, and helping.

He led forth to battle *his tried ones*—trained and skilful and trusty—*born in his own house*, and thus well-known and confidential house servants and body-guard, *three hundred and eighteen*, answering to more than a thousand men, women, and children, with flocks and herds of a corresponding extent. What was the force of his allies does not appear. This large number of slaves in Abram's house, capable of bearing arms, gives us an insight into the patriarchal household. These slaves were such as were originally taken in war, or bought with money. Many were also born in the house and *trained* in the doctrines and duties of religion, and admitted into the privileges of circumcision and the Sabbath, and treated as a religious charge. "Abram commanded his children, and his household after him, that they might keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord might bring upon Abram all that He had promised."—*(Jacobus.)*

It is the duty of the Church of God to train all who belong to her for service. The Church of God is still militant here on earth, and has not entered upon the repose of victory.

Small force of man, and great faith in God, may do mighty things.—*(Hughes.)*

He armed his trained servants. Or *catechised;* such as he had painfully principled both in religion and military discipline, tractable and trusty, ready pressed for any such purpose. It is recorded to the commendation of Queen Elizabeth, that she provided for war, even when she had most perfect peace with all men. Darts foreseen are *dintless.*—(*Trapp*).

Verse 15. By prompt movements, Abram and his troop soon came up with the enemy. It was in the dead of the night. The conquerors, it is likely, were off their guard, thinking no doubt that the country was subdued, and that scarcely a dog was left in it that dare move his tongue against them. But when haughty men say, Peace, peace; lo sudden destruction cometh! Attacked after so many victories they are surprised and confounded: and it being in the night, they could not tell but their assailants might be ten times more numerous than they were, so they flee in confusion, and were pursued from Dan even to Hobah in Syria. —(*Fuller.*)

Abram came upon them as they were, secure, sleepy, and drunken, as Josephus writeth. So did David upon the Amalekites (1 Sam. xxx. 16), and Ahab the Syrians (1 Kings xx. 16).—*(Trapp).*

A state of warfare necessitates policy and stratagem.

Verse 16. Abram's object was simply the recovery of Lot and his family; and having accomplished this he is satisfied. It is surprising that amidst all this confusion and slaughter their lives should be preserved, yet so it was, and he with his property and family, and all the other captives taken with him are brought safe back again. It was ill for Lot to be found among the Sodomites; but it was well for the Sodomites that he was so, else they had been ruined before they were.—(*Fuller*).

Those who are strangers to the knowledge of God have often shared in those deliverances which He has wrought out for His people.

Abram delivered others besides his kinsman Lot. There are duties of heroic enterprise and benevolence which we owe to men, irrespective of creed or race.

It is true heroism to come to the rescue of the defenceless and weak. This is imitating the kindness of God, which is most tender and plentiful towards His feeblest creature.

And the women also and the people. The hope of this might haply move that officious messenger to address himself to the old Hebrew (ver. 13), little set by, till now that they were in distress.—(*Trapp*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17—20.

THE TRUE PRIEST FOR MANKIND.

There is in man such a deep consciousness of sin that he feels he is not fit to appear before God. He needs some one who shall be his mediator and representative, and who offers up that sacrifice for sin which turns away wrath and restores the forfeited favour of God. Hence the necessity for a priest. The idea of a priesthood is universal, and no improvement of human society can ever supersede it; for the fact must still remain that, by nature, there is a deep gulf between man's soul and God. This office has often been abused to serve the purposes of tyranny and oppression, and to retard the civil and intellectual progress of mankind. Still, with all the abuses which have degraded it, the office stands. Wherever men go they seek, in some form or other, the aid of the priest. To this need of the human heart the Providence of God has given an answer. In the verses before us we have the true ideal of a priest such as man requires and God approves. What must be the qualifications of such?

I. **The true priest is divinely appointed.** Melchizedek was "priest of the Most High God." This implies—1 *That he was called of God.* As it is the prerogative of God, in His dealings with His creatures, to take the first step of approach and to state His own terms, so no one can become a mediator in such a matter unless God appoints him to that office. As the purpose of mercy belongs to God, so He must choose the means of its conveyance to mankind. No man, therefore, can take this office upon himself. Unless he receives the Divine call he is an impostor and profane. 2. *That he was separated from the rest of mankind.* The true priest must be holy by vocation; and one of the essential parts of holiness is separation from all that is evil. By some lustration, or white robe, or other external sign, he must be distinguished from the profane crowd, and possess, at least, symbolic purity. Melchizedek has stood apart from all mankind, as reflecting the awful holiness of his God. Men require the mediation of some one who stands nearer to God than themselves. Holiness is the raiment wherewith God clothes His priests.

II. **The true priest is one with the race he represents.** This "priest of the Most High God" was not an angelic being, but of the same flesh and blood as the rest of mankind. The true priest must be taken from among men. There is a deep conviction in the heart of humanity that deliverance can only come through some one selected from among themselves. He alone who partakes of our nature can have a real fellow-feeling with us, and know how to have compassion upon our infirmity. He who represents the human race, and is a mediator with God on their account, must himself be one of that race. Humanity is a necessary element in a Redeemer. We can only be saved through a Divine man; for he touches God at one extremity and ourselves at the other, and brings us together. From this we learn—1. *The dignity of human nature.* There must be something in human nature which makes it capable of representing what is Divine, or else the Incarnation would have been impossible. The great preparations for human redemption imply that man has a sublime value, and can be rendered capable of partaking of the Divine nature. We learn also—2. *The destiny of human nature.* If man and God can be brought together through the agency of a mediator, then that reconciliation with God must have the tendency to draw man continually God-wards, and thus his soul is made to enter upon the upward path. When God pardons sin He is removing the barrier between the sinner and Himself, so that the objects of His mercy may be fitted to dwell with Him and see His glory.

III. **The true priest has the power to bless.** "And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth" (verse 19). This was a sacerdotal act, and he who administered it was, in regard to his office, superior to him on whom it was bestowed. "The less is blessed of the better" (Heb. vii. 7). Thus it is the office of the true priest—1. *To pronounce blessings on men.* He is not the origin of blessing, but only declares authoritatively what God offers and bestows. He does not *make* the fact of God's pardon and peace, but *announces* it as an ambassador who has authority to act for his sovereign. 2. *To bless God on their behalf.* When man receives a benefit, God should be praised. We must not selfishly rest in the enjoyment of His goodness so as to forget the glory due to His name. The priest who stretches forth his hands to bless men, also lifts his eyes towards heaven to bless God on their behalf. 3. *To declare God's benefits towards men.* "And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine" (verse 18). These are the standing elements of the body's sustenance and refreshment. Bread is the staff of life, and wine maketh glad the heart of man. These were brought forth by this priest of the Most High God, in order to serve the lower use of the refreshment of the body. Such was the first intention of this act; but there was a second and more important one which can hardly escape our notice. These gifts of God, so essential to the life of the body, signified spiritual blessings—the soul's necessary food. Melchizedek was, therefore, the minister of holy symbols; which, while they visibly represented blessings not discerned by sense, were, at the same time, the means of the conveyance of those blessings to the soul The pure and good gifts of God in the natural world shadow forth those of the spiritual. Both the visible and invisible worlds come from one Creator, and correspond to each other as type and antitype. Hence the use of symbolical worship and teaching. Our Blessed Lord took hold of these emblems of bread and wine, constituting them a holy ordinance for the remembrance of His death and passion, and effectual means of grace to the soul. In partaking of this bread and wine, Abraham was enjoying a spiritual repast which strengthened and refreshed the inner man. All the ministries and symbols of religion are but means to an end, and that end is the sanctification of our nature. Spiritual good is the only abiding reality; all else is representative and shadowy. The priests are of no value who lead us only to what is outward and visible, and who do not offer real blessings and urge us forwards to their attainment.

IV. **The true priest is a mediator between God and men.** He is the appointed medium of bringing together man and God upon terms which the Divine mercy has approved. Thus the true priest is the channel of blessings which flow in opposite directions—from God to man, and from man to God. 1. *He receives gifts from God for men.* Gifts of pardon, peace, reconciliation—the tokens of God's favour. There can be no religion unless God imparts something to men. If heaven is but a wall of brass then the prayers and aspirations of mankind are of no avail. He can be no true priest who has not something to offer from God to men. 2. *He receives gifts from men for God.* We cannot, strictly speaking, add anything to God's riches or His glory by our works or gifts. As we have nothing but what we have received from His bounty, so we can really give Him nothing that was not previously His own. But God is pleased to receive our thanks and praises—our easiest recompense. He receives offerings of man's worldly substance which testify of the gratitude of his heart and soul. Thus Melchizedek took gifts from Abram that he might offer them to God. "And he gave him tithes of all." Such was Abram's response to the priestly benediction. The offering of tithes is an acknowledgment on the part of man that all belongs to God. The king-priest received them from the patriarch that he might offer them to God, who has a right to all that man possesses, and to his entire service. "In presenting the tenth of all the spoils of victory, Abram makes a practical acknowledgment of the absolute and exclusive supremacy of the God whom Melchizedek worshipped, and of the authority and validity of the priesthood which he exercised. We have here all the indications of a stated order of sacred rites, in which a costly service, with a fixed official, is maintained at a public expense, according to a definite rate of contribution" (*Murphy*). Religion demands that man shall give some token of his allegiance to God, and man is appointed to receive such in His name. The ministry of man to men, on behalf of God, belongs to the nature of the Church's work on earth. But the full idea was not realised until God was manifest in the flesh. Then had we a Mediator, who was compassionate because He was human, and strong because He was Divine. Other mediators had been commissioned to convey spiritual blessings to mankind, but Christ alone brought salvation with Him and bestowed it from Himself.

MELCHIZEDEK A TYPE OF CHRIST.

We have inspired authority for regarding this "priest of the Most High God" as a type of our blessed Lord. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives this application to the prophecy of the Psalmist, "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psa. cx. 4; Heb. v. 6, vi. 20). The history of the meeting of the patriarch with this remarkable man must be read by the light which Christ throws back upon it. Abraham rejoiced to see the day of the Son of Man, and to Him, in the person of Melchizedek, he did homage and received blessing. Christ was present to the minds of both. He was truly in their midst, making the blessing effectual, and the gifts truly an offering to God. Let us see how Melchizedek was fitted to be a type of Christ.

I. **He was a royal priest.** The priesthood of Aaron's house and of the Levitical order were all purely and simply priests. They had no regal state or function. Melchizedek combined in his person the offices and powers both of priest and king. In this regard he was not a partial, but a complete representative and type of the Messiah, who is described by the prophet as "a priest upon His throne" (Zech. vi. 13), and who reigns over a kingdom of righteousness and peace (Psa. lxxii.) Either character by itself could not be an exact and complete type of Christ, who holds the double office. Our souls need His priesthood for expiation, and His kingship, that they may preserve that righteousness which belongs to His kingdom.

II. His genealogy is mysterious. As a priest Melchizedek has no pedigree. He is not a single unit in the order of succession, for he has none going before or coming after him in the priestly office. His function and state are not transmitted to others, but remain attached to himself. Hence that strange description of him in the Epistle to the Hebrews:—"Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually." Both ends of the life of this remarkable man are shrouded in mystery, and he is therefore a fitting type of the Son of God, whose manifestation in our flesh must of necessity be mysterious. "Who shall declare His generation?" for, in reference to His human nature He had no father, and in reference to His Divine nature He had no mother. In this respect Our Lord stands alone among all the sons of men, and Melchizedek, whose origin and end are purposely made obscure, is chosen herein to be His type.

III. He was perpetually a priest. Melchizedek in his own person was mortal and shared the common lot of mankind; but that *type* of priesthood which he represented was perpetual. As it began before, so it lasted throughout the whole of the Jewish history. The Jewish priesthood had "beginning of days and end of life," but that of Melchizedek continued in Christ for ever. To that eternal priesthood the honour of God was committed, it shared the unchangeableness of His nature; but the priesthood of Aaron's line was, as it were, parenthetical in the Divine plan, to endure only while such a temporary provision was necessary. The greater light was to swallow up the lesser, and to continue a joy for ever to the Church of God. Melchizedek was the type of those real attributes of our Lord's priesthood which in their very nature are eternal.

IV. He was an universal priest. The Jewish priesthood was limited to their own nation and people. Strangers in race and blood were neither permitted to sustain that office nor to enjoy the most important benefits which it conferred. The range of it was narrow and confined, scarcely at all affecting the great mass of mankind outside. But Melchizedek was the priest of humanity at large, and was therefore an exact type of Christ, who was the all-sufficient priest for mankind of every age and nation.

V. He was a priest of the highest type. As compared with the priesthood of Aaron that of Melchizedek was superior—1. *In time.* It belonged to an earlier age, and therefore had the prescription of antiquity in its favour. Such was the priesthood of Our Lord: though late as to the supreme moment in which it became a fact, it had been fashioned early in the counsels of God. This priest, as well as His offering, had been from the foundations of the world. It was also superior—2. *In dignity.* Levi virtually acknowledged a priesthood higher than his own, when he paid tithes to Melchizedek and received his blessing. 3. *Superior in duration.* Unlike the Levitical, his priesthood was not designed to serve a temporary purpose. It belonged to an order of things which endures, not through one short stage but through the whole of human history. Christ is "a priest for ever." His office and the virtues of it last as as long as sinful man needs forgiveness.

VI. His priesthood has the highest confirmation. It was confirmed by the Divine oath—by an appeal to two immutable things—the Divine word and the Divine nature. The Levitical priesthood was not introduced or confirmed by such a solemnity, because it formed no part of the eternal plan of God. It could not sustain the full honour of that glorious Name which meant much more for man than the most fitly chosen types and ceremonies could signify. God will only give the highest confirmation to that priest who brings grace and truth—who gives to men the reality instead of the shadow, and reveals the fulness and beauty of the Divine love.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 17. Abram is now congratulated upon his success. His faith obtained a good report.

Abram has now won the praise of the world—the result of those works by which his faith was made perfect (James iii. 22). This was a new trial to his faith, but the strength of his religious character was shown in his superiority to all worldly aims and possessions.

There are events in history which force the world to acknowledge the servants of God.

This expedition of Abram and his friends excited great attention among the Canaanites. At the very time when all must have been given up for lost, they are, without any effort of their own, recovered, and the spoilers spoiled. The little victorious band, now returning in peace, are hailed by everyone that meets them. The kings of the different cities go forth to congratulate them, and thank them as the deliverers of their country. If Abram had been of the disposition of those marauders whom he had defeated, he would have followed up his victory, and made himself master of the whole country, which he might probably have done with ease in their present enfeebled and scattered condition. But thus did not Abram, because of the fear of God.—(*Fuller*).

Verse 18. Melchizedek—the first priest on record.

The typology connected with Melchizedek does not require that he himself should be regarded as any superhuman person, but merely exalts the human circumstances under which he appears into symbols of superhuman things. Everything combines to show that Melchizedek was a Canaanitish king who had retained the worship of the true God, and combined in his own person the offices of king and priest. It is to be observed that there is not used regarding him, nor does he use, the title of Jehovah, but that of the High God, a title found also in the question addressed (Micah vi. 6) by the Moabitish king, Balak, to his prophet Balaam; but that Abram in answering the King of Sodom probably in his presence, affirms the identity of his covenant-God, Jehovah, with the *High God, possessor of heaven and earth*, of whom Melchizedek had spoken.—(*Alford*).

Melchizedek was not only a type of Christ, but also represented the genius of the Christian religion. His priesthood was not limited to one nation or country, but was universal. Such is the Christian Church, which offers a home to all people.

The universal element in religion is the permanent. Judaism, which was but a temporary provision, has passed away, but that order of things which Melchizedek represented will stand till the end of time.

Some of the highest examples of the knowledge of the eternal verities of religion, and of faith in God, have been furnished by the heathen world—Melchizedek, Job, the Centurion, the Syro-Phœnician woman, Cornelius.

Bread and Wine. These are significant as the staple elements of refreshment for the body. Bread is the acknowledged staff of life, and hence was presented in the holy place of the Tabernacle as the *shew-bread*, or bread of the Presence. So it was presented at the Pentecost—the *loaves* representing the fruit of the Gospel work, and significant of the harvest and ingathering of the people. And so the wine was poured out as a libation at the daily sacrifice as a drink-offering (Ex. xxix. 40), also at the presentation of the first-fruits (Lev. xxiii. 13), and other offerings (Num. xv. 5). And from this Old Testament ordinance it passed to the Lord's Supper by Divine institution, and its significance in the latter was explained as symbolical of the blood-shedding of Christ for sinners, and the participation of it as an element of the Gospel feast becomes joyous to the Christian soul. They had a meaning, therefore, in the hands of Melchizedek, and in this sacred, official transaction. Abram is thus welcomed to a share in the sacred sacramental ceremonial, and witnessed to as having a right to that ancient communion of saints. This solitary priest hails him as one whom he recognises and rejoices in—as the head of the faithful, and the triumphant "friend of God."—(*Jacobus*).

This feast was significant of the life, strength, and joy which the Gospel would bring to the world. Thus there was represented to Abram what a blessing he would be to all nations.

Melchizedek refreshed the warriors after the battle, and Christ ordained His Last Supper to refresh the weary soldiers of the Cross.

Bread and wine are common things, familiar to the eye, the touch, and taste of men. The Great Teacher takes them out of the hands of man as emblems of grace, mercy, and peace, through an accepted ransom; of the lowliest as well as the loftiest boon of an everlasting salvation, and they have never lost their significance or appropriateness.—(*Murphy*).

The Most High God. This is a name of God here first found in the Scripture. *El*, signifying strength, is the base of the name Elohim—the original, absolute name of God, by which He is known in the history of the Creation, and appropriate to His creatorship. This is the evidence that the one God was worshipped, as a testimony against polytheism and idolatry, as the Living God, omnipotent and supreme. And this was done formally, publicly, and statedly by a set ministry, and in such form of worship as acknowledged the need of the great blood-shedding for atonement, and of the great high priesthood to come.—(*Jacobus.*)

Verse 19. God has ordained that all blessings shall come to men through His own Priest. Melchizedek was the type, but Christ was the reality.

The Christian religion has only one Priest, who is now in heaven, and who is the only fount of blessing for mankind.

Melchizedek blessed Abram. He therefore acts in a priestly capacity. This sacerdotal act of his is that which is so significant, as interpreted by the New Testament:—"For the less is blessed of the better" (Heb. vii. 7). And Abram, in receiving the blessing, admits the superiority of this king-priest. The friend of God, the covenant-head and father of the faithful, has victory granted him over kings, and is thus a type of every true Christian and of the Church of Christ on the earth, while he expresses his faith and religious reverence and obedience by paying tithes to the accredited functionary of God's worship. The key to this mystery is, that both these personages were types of Christ; and their meeting here is a significant confluence of the streams of prophecy and promise, rushing onward to the destined consummation.—(*Jacobus*).

Melchizedek, in pronouncing this blessing, was only setting his seal to that which was already a fact in Abram's spiritual life. The patriarch already *belonged* to the Most High God, was His servant, His child, His friend. Thus the human instrument only *declares* the blessing, but does not make it.

The Most High God is here designated as the Founder of heaven and earth, the Great Architect or Builder, and, therefore, Possessor of all things. There is here no indistinct allusion to the creation of "heaven and earth" mentioned in the opening of the Book of God. This is a manifest identification of the God of Melchizedek with the one Creator and Upholder of all things. We have here no mere local or national deity with limited power and province, but the sole and supreme God of the universe and of man.—(*Murphy*).

All blessings become assured to us by the fact that they are the gift of Him who made the heavens and the earth. No other Being can confer any lasting good.

God, who possesses all things, had

the right to dispose of them as it seemed good unto Him. He could give the land to Abram and to his seed.

God is the Proprietor of all things. We hold all blessings by His bounty and as His stewards.

Verse 20. Blessings received by man must be followed by thanksgiving to God. God blesses us, and we bless Him.

The second part of this benedictory prayer is a thanksgiving to the common God of Melchizedek and Abram for the victory which had been vouchsafed to the latter. *Thy foes.* Here Abram is personally addressed. Melchizedek as a priest first appeals to God on behalf of Abram, and then addresses Abram on behalf of God. He thus performs the part of a mediator.—(*Murphy*).

This Royal Priest in blessing God manifested—1. His piety and devotion. He looks away from the good which has been bestowed, to the fountainhead of all blessing. 2. His appreciation of the true source of all victorious effort on the part of God's people. Instead of praising Abram's valour and skill, he praises the God of Abram who gave the victory.

Here is the first conflict of the children of faith with the world-power, and the victory vouchsafed to the former points to their final triumph. Those who are on the side of God must prevail in the end. There is no other really strong power.

And he gave him a tithe of all. This is a very significant act. In presenting the tenth of all the spoils of victory, Abram makes a practical acknowledgment of the absolute and exclusive supremacy of the God whom Melchizedek worshipped, and of the authority and validity of the priesthood which he exercised. We have here all the indications of a stated order of sacred rites, in which costly service, with a fixed official, is maintained at the public expense, according to a definite rate of contribution. The gift in the present case is the tenth of the spoils of war. This act of Abram, though recorded last, may have taken place at the commencement of the interview. At all events, it renders it extremely probable that a sacrifice had been offered to God, through the intervention of Melchizedek, before he brought forth the bread and wine of the accepted feast.—(*Murphy*).

Christ, as the true Priest, still demands the consecration of our worldly substance to His service.

Christ, our Mediator, not only receives gifts from God to convey them to men, but also receives gifts from men to present them to God.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 21—24.

THE BELIEVER'S SUPERIORITY TO THE WORLD.

Throughout the whole course of his conduct Abram maintains the character of a steady believer in God. He had won many victories by his faith; but here his faith is seen giving that victory which overcometh the world. The believing soul lives above the Spirit and the maxims of the age. This superiority to the world may be manifested in various ways—as in the case of Abram.

I. By refusing to insist upon lawful rights and privileges. After the battle the King of Sodom is ready to concede to Abram his lawful rights, *i.e.*, the spoils of warfare, only reserving the captives for himself. Yet Abram refuses what was justly his by the customs of war. He will not claim even a lawful privilege when by so doing he might injure his religious character. or bring dishonour on the cause of God. There are times when religious men must refuse to insist upon what they may lawfully demand as their right. 1. *When it brings them into dangerous association with the world.* If Abram had accepted the spoils of warfare, he would have acted in strict justice; but, on the other hand, he must have entered into relations with the King of Sodom, which, though lawful at first, might in the end have injured the tone of his spiritual character, or have even corrupted it altogether. Any privilege is dearly purchased when it brings us into such relations with the world as place our souls in peril. With the believer, the principle of separation from the world is a far higher one than that by which he claims any human right. Believers must also forego even what the world is ready to yield as a lawful right. 2. *When they might appear to countenance sin.* Abram had seen the wickedness of Sodom. If he had received the spoils, he would have appeared to approve of Lot's association with that people, and so far he would have countenanced their sin. It is better to give up any lawful advantage rather than that we should appear to take pleasure in those who do iniquity. It was far better that Abram should lose by his valour than that his religious character should be placed in an equivocal position. That which is lawful is not always expedient. To every believer the welfare of God's righteous cause is the first consideration.

II. By refusing to acknowledge the world as the source of true greatness. Abram took an oath—made a solemn appeal to God—that he would take not even the smallest thing from the King of Sodom; giving this reason, "Lest thou shouldst say, I have made Abram rich." (Ver. 23). He attributed his worldly prosperity to the blessing of that God in whom he believed, and he would avoid all appearances that might lead men to ascribe it to any other source. There were two thoughts which supported him in this spirit of noble independence. 1. *He was chosen of God.* He had been called by the Divine voice, and had led a life manifestly guided and controlled by Providence. He felt that he was chosen to be a blessing to mankind. He was confident that God would mark out his way. He who feels that God has called him to his place and work can afford to take high ground. 2. *He was heir to the promises.* God had promised him the whole of the land, and however men might hinder, that promise would surely be fulfilled. His success depended not upon the will of man—it was assured by the Word of God. The believer is greater than the world, for he is safe in the faithfulness of God.

III. By showing that he stands on a different footing, and has better hopes than the children of this world. Abram refuses for himself the spoils offered by the King of Sodom. He is ready to give up his own rights, but he will not prevent others from asserting theirs. He allows his young men to take their subsistence, and the allies their portion. (Ver. 24). They would only be receiving what was justly their due. But Abram will show that he is not careful about these things. He stands upon a higher plane, and has a wider horizon. He is "looking for a better country, that is an heavenly," and he can afford to think lightly of every earthly good. Thus the believer, though in the world, is not of it. He belongs to God, and that is enough. All the children of faith are marked by a certain greatness of mind, which enables them to live above the world.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 21. It would seem that, while these things were going on between Melchizedek and Abram, the King of Sodom stood by and heard what passed, but without taking any particular interest in it. What occurred between these two great characters appears to have made no impression upon him. Apparently he thought of nothing, and cared for nothing, but what respected himself. Though there is no evidence that he could claim any right, at least to the goods, yet he speaks in a manner as if he would be thought a little generous in relinquishing them.—*(Bush.)*

And take the goods to thyself. It

would seem that here the king claims his own due, and allows Abram his. According to Arab usage, Abram had an undoubted right to the recovered goods and cattle. The custom is—if an enemy has spoiled an Arab camp, and carried away some of the persons as prisoners, and if the whole be afterwards recovered by another party—for the persons to be restored, but for the property to remain in the possession of those by whom it was recaptured. This exalts the conduct of Abraham in declining to receive his due, and detracts from the generosity for which the King of Sodom has obtained credit. Indeed, we see that Abram himself admits the right of his friends to that which, for himself, he declined.—*(Pict. Bible.)*

Verse 22. *I have lifted up my hand.* This is a serious matter with Abram. Either before, or then and there, he made an oath or solemn asseveration before God, with uplifted hand, that he would not touch the property of Sodom. He must have felt there was danger of moral contamination in coming into any political relationship with the cities of the vale. *The* LORD, *the most high God, the Founder of heaven and earth.* In this conjunction of names, Abram solemnly and expressly identifies the God of himself and of Melchizedek in the presence of the King of Sodom. The most high God of Melchizedek is the God of the first chapter of Genesis, and the Jehovah of Adam, Noah, and Abram.—*(Murphy.)*

To the designation by which Melchizedek knew God Abram adds the Sacred Name, which was revealed to himself. Every expression of the Divine Nature in human words enlarges our knowledge of God.

I have lifted up my hand. A swearing gesture (Dan xii. 7, Rev. x. 5, 6). Neither doth he this rashly, but for very good reason: first, that by this oath, as by a buckler, he might fence himself against all covetous desires of the spoil; secondly, that he did seriously remit of that which was his right, and went not to war for wages; thirdly, hereby to profess his faith and religion in opposition to their superstitious vanities.—*(Trapp).*

Verse 23. Abram knew with what kind of man he had to deal. He was one of the prudent who foreseeth the evil, and therefore had already made up his mind what course to take.

He for whom the "Possessor of heaven and earth" has engaged to provide has no need to be beholden to any for his well-being, and especially in cases where his motives are liable to be misconstrued.

We should refuse the gifts of men when, by accepting them, we run the risk of bringing dishonour upon God.

Believers are so rich in their spiritual inheritance, and have so full a reward in God, that when it is expedient to do so, they can afford, in a spirit of noble generosity, to despise the world's gifts.

The reason why he would not be under the shadow of an obligation, or anything which might be construed an obligation to him, was not so much a regard to his own honour, but the honour of HIM *in whose name he had sworn.* Abram's God had blessed him, and promised to bless him more, and make him a blessing. Let it not be said by his enemies that with all his blessedness it is of our substance that he is what he is. No; Abram can trust in the "possessor of heaven and earth" to provide for him, without being beholden to the King of Sodom. —*(Fuller).*

Lest thou should say, I have made Abram rich. Occasion must not be given to any to speak the least evil of us, lest Christ be dishonoured: for every Christian quartereth arms with Christ. And if Abram do anything unbeseeming himself, Abram's God shall be blasphemed at Sodom.—*(Trapp).*

The generous conduct of Abram would raise him in the estimation of the Canaanites. The world has some admiration for true nobility of soul and disinterested goodness.

Verse 24. His excepting the portion of the young men who were in league with him shows a just sense of propriety. In giving up our own right we are not at liberty to give away that which pertains to others connected with us.—(*Fuller*).

We may, for sufficient reasons, give up a portion of our liberty; but we have no right to abridge the liberty of others to whom such reasons are not present.

Vows to God must not imply unjust things to men.—(*Hughes*).

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XIV.

BY THE

REV. WM. ADAMSON.

Battle and Blessing! Vers. 1—24. (1) Numerous as are the mountains of Switzerland, one stands out singular and unique. It belongs to Switzerland, and bears signs of resemblance to the other hills and valleys of the country; yet it has its own peculiar individuality. Who does not recognise the special prominence of Mont Blanc? (2) The rocky mountains of the far West are a magnificent range, evidencing their continuous and successive resemblance one with the other. Yet there is a spur, so singular and unique in its formation and contour, that for a moment the traveller almost fancies it is out of place. (3) This chapter has the air and aspect of an episode in history. It stands out singular and unique. As Candlish says, "The warlike character which Abram assumes is a solitary exception to the usual tenor of his life; while his subsequent interview with the royal priest is altogether peculiar. (4) A plant grows in Eastern jungles which sheds a clear light when all beside is dark. To midnight travellers amid Himalayan hills it seems as if it were a lamp to guide them on their wanderings. And the appearance of Melchizedek is just such a plant-lamp, pointing to Him who is a Priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedek.

"On the truth thus dimly shadowed
Later days a lustre shed,
When the Great High Priest eternal
Offers us both wine and bread."

Four Kings! Vers. 1—16. Lincoln says that we have here a scene representing millenial glory. It is to be received prophetically and practically. (1) Prophetically, we have here the *four* kingdoms of Daniel, Tidal standing for the fourth of these, viz., Rome. For the Roman empire will yet again be headed up under ten kings, who, Lincoln conceives, are to sweep away corrupt, unclean Christianity after the removal of the Church to heaven. And thus Abram is the Jews, who, after the overthrow of Rome in the plain of Armageddon, are to be blessed by the appearance of their Messiah. (2) Practically, we have here three battles, the second of which represents the man of faith, relying solely on faith, as he goes forth to attack the confederated hosts, and to deliver Lot. The second is, however, preliminary to the third; and in Abram's case the most important of all. It was the struggle with Sodom against receiving any gift. It was the struggle of the moral against the material—of the spiritual against the sinful. No doubt the timely interposition of Melchizedek with refreshment and benediction nerved the patriarch's soul for victory.

"Here is My grace—the mighty power victorious,
Which fights so strong for thy poor feeble strength;
Which nerves thy faith, the faith all-glorious,
Which fights and wins, and enters heaven at length."

Chedorlaomer, etc.! Ver. 1, etc. (1) Four hundred years ago, Spain held the reins of power, and swayed her sceptre over Europe, Africa, and the Americas. By and by that supremacy passed over to England, who now occupies many of the Spanish conquests. Centuries before, the Persians were a great power in the East, and acquired ascendancy over surrounding powers; but in course of time this position was occupied by the Greeks, who, under Alexander the Great, became successful invaders of distant countries. Centuries before, the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar attained immense superiority over surrounding principalities, which in turn was wrested from them by the fierce wide sweep of Cyrus the Great. (2). In the same way it seems that the supremacy of the Babylonians under Nimrod passed into the hands of the Elamites, who, as Rawlinson says, exercised a suzerainty over the lower Mesopotamian country. These Elamites felt themselves strong enough to make warlike expeditions into the distant land of Palestine. Chedorlaomer, with his vassal princes, had thus twelve years previously forced the kings in the Vale of Siddim to become his tributaries. Apparently, these subject monarchs sought to gain their independence, and thus brought upon themselves a second visit from the Elamite Chedorlaomer.

"Lord God of Peace, awake!
Thou Prince of Peace give ear!
The strength of battle break,
Both shield and sword and spear,
Bid wars and battles now to cease,
And o'er the tumult whisper 'Peace.'"

Rephaims, etc.! Ver. 5. Porter says that the modern Kenath was no doubt the Abrahamic "Karnaim." He thinks that the Rephaims were the aboriginal inhabitants of Bashan, and probably of the greater part of Canaan. Corbeaux, however, identifies them with the shepherd race which once held dominions in Egypt. On visiting Kenath, Professor Porter found the ruins beautiful and interesting. In no other city had he seen so many statues. Unfortunately, these were all mutilated; but some of them were recognisable. Before a little temple lay a colossal head of Ashtaroth, which, now sadly broken, had evidently been a chief idol. It had the two horns (Carnaim) on its head, and was thus a visible illustration of an incidental allusion in verse 5. May Kenath not be the capital of the Rephaims!

"Dark fell the night of Carnaim's woe,
Deep was the sleep of men,
While downward swept proud Elam's foe,
On Rephaim's watchmen then."

Emim, etc.! Ver. 5. (1). Job's friend said, "Speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee." And this is commendable in more senses than one. Geologists explore the strata of the earth, and discover, thereby, its successive epoch-convulsions and upheavals. Antiquarians and travellers also explore the ruins of cities, and thus ascertain the changes which cities have undergone. They can read the past history of a nation in the ruin-strata of its cities, just as the geologist can read the past geological periods of our earth as shown in the strata of the earth's crust. (2) Porter remarks the truth of this in regard to ancient Bozrah, built and inhabited by the gigantic Emim long before Abram migrated to Canaan. He describes a visit to the ruins, some of which record the changes in its history. In one spot, deep down beneath the accumulated remains of Greek and Roman sculpture, were simple, massive, primitive buildings—homes of the ancient aborigines. Having one of the finest climates in the world, yet the old home of the giant Emim is utterly deserted; without man, without inhabitant, and without beast (Isa. xxxiii. 10).

"'Tis all desolate now—a ruin wild
O'erspreads both hill and plain,
And the frolicsome mirth of Bozrah's child
Is heard no more again;
And the ruin of homesteads is ruinous more
Than the wrecks that are strewed on the earth's sea shore."

Kiriathaim! Ver. 5. We have here some of the most ancient houses of which the world can boast. As Porter remarks, they are just such dwellings as a race of giants would build. The walls and roofs, but especially the ponderous gates, doors, and bars, are in every way characteristic of a period when architecture was in its infancy, when giants were masons, and when strength and security were the grand requisites. The heavy stone slabs of the roofs resting on the massive walls make the structure as firm as if built of solid masonry, and the black basalt used is almost as hard as iron. There can scarcely be a doubt that these are the cities erected and inhabited by the Rephaim—that on these masses of masonry, which Ritter remarks now stand as constant witnesses of the conquest of Bashan by Jehovah, Abram gazed—and that amid these secure strongholds Chedorlaomer and his Elamite warriors roamed ere they attacked the kings in the Vale of Siddim. Yet how dreary now!

"Cold, chill, mysterious, full of awe and dread,
Is this strange home of living and of dead."

Kirioth-Kiriathaim! Ver. 5. (1) Travellers tell us that the Druses of Kerioth are all armed, and always carry their arms. With their goats on the hill-side, with their yokes of oxen in the field, with their asses or camels on the road, at all hours, in all places, their rifles are slung, their swords by their side, and their pistols in their belts. Their daring chief, too, goes forth on his expeditions equipped in a helmet of steel, and a coat of linked mail. (2) The ruins are of great extent. No large public building now exists entire; but there are traces of many. Graham remarks that in the streets and lanes are numerous fragments of columns and other vestiges of ancient grandeur. Its position amongst wide-spread rockfields made it a formidable task, no doubt, to the Elamite invader to subdue; while the giant race which tenanted its massive homes would increase the difficulty

"Of a charge by his legions in battle array,
Now defying the foeman, now blent in the fray."

Horites! Ver. 6. (1) These received their name from dwelling in caves. Strabo says that the life of these cave-dwellers was nomadic. They are governed by tyrants, wear skins, and carry spears and shields which are covered with raw hides. They anoint their bodies with a mixture of blood and milk, drink an infusion of buckthorn, and travel and tend their flocks by night. (2) It is interesting to know that the excavated dwellings of the Horites are still found in hundreds in the sandstone cliffs and mountains of Edom, and especially in Petra. Some of them, Wilson says, have windows as well as doors. In front of others are receptacles for water. They are all approachable by a common way. The region is now a habitation of dragons—literally, as Irby says, swarming with lizards and scorpions, etc. (3) Mount Hor, upon which Aaron died, is a striking summit. Mangles remarks that an artist who would study rock scenery in all its wildest and most extravagant forms, and in colours, which, to no one who has not seen them, would scarcely appear to be in nature, would find himself rewarded should he resort to Mount Hor for that purpose.

"Gay lizards glittering on the walls
Of ruin'd shrines, busy and bright,
As they were all alive with light;
And yet more splendid, numerous flocks
Of pigeons settling on the rocks,
With their rich, restless wings."—*Moore.*

Hazezon-Tamar! Ver. 7. (1) Rounding the southern end of the Dead Sea and conquering the Amalekites, Chedorlaomer came up on the west side of the Dead Sea to a place known as "The Pruning of the Palm." Here, midway up the shore of the Dead Sea, is a little plain, shut in by the rugged, rocky hills of Engedi. A sweet fountain bursts from the rock high up on the western side, four hundred feet up, and comes down shaking its spray over the green bushes and plants which grow by its side—acacias, mimozas, and lotus. Thus far the Elamite conqueror came on his military expedition of 2,000 miles. (2) It was a roundabout route, either because (*a*) he wanted a convenient pass by which to conduct his army; or, because (*b*) he wished to leave no enemy in his rear. Here it was that the Kings of the Vale of Siddon marched out to be defeated.

"See how the hosts uprise;
Confusèd noise, and then
The march of Death, the cries
Of wounded dying men!
Behold the red and gory flood;
And, lo, the garments rolled in blood."
—*Maguire.*

Slime-Pits! Ver. 10. (1) In the far north of Palestine are famous *bitumen* wells. This mineral exudes slowly in a semi-liquid state as petroleum, which hardens into bitumen. The Arabs on the shore of the Dead Sea say that the bitumen there is formed in the same way. They say that it forms on the rocks in the depths of the sea, and by earthquakes, or other submarine concussions, is broken up in large masses, and rises to the surface. (2) Thomson points out that no doubt the Sodomites were in the habit of digging bitumen wells. It was doubtless an article of merchandise, as petroleum is from the American oil-springs now. Apparently, the Egyptians employed it largely in embalming their dead. When cold it is as brittle as glass, but it melts readily. It must be mixed with tar while melting, and in that way forms a hard, glassy wax, impervious to water. (3) As the Dead Sea now is it could not well have been in Lot's time. No doubt the region was exceedingly beautiful, and the fresh, sparkling waters of the lake alive with boats and fish. All this was changed at the overthrow of the Cities of the Plain, when, in addition to the "heavenly fires," there issued from these "bitumen-wells"—

"Streams of burning, fiery spirit,
Liquid lava hot as coal,
Pouring forth on every homestead,
Like as rivers onward roll."

Mountain Flight! Ver. 10. (1) When the South African chief, Sekukuni, who had ravaged the borders of the white man's land, was assailed by the English soldiers, he and his followers fled to a mountain, and hid themselves in the caves and recesses. (2) History relates how it was usual for the Vandois, when attacked by the Papal troops, to remove their families and goods for security to the Alpine heights and caverns, where they could make a firm stand against their merciless foes. (3) The Archbishop of Tyre relates that when Baldwin IV., one of the Crusade kings of Jerusalem, ravaged the fruitful valley of Bacar, the inhabitants fled to the mountains, whither his troops could not easily follow them. (4) D'Arvieux says that in his time, when the Arabs attacked the rebel peasants of the Holy Land in the plain of Gonin, they fled towards the hills, and there, hiding themselves, were secure from attack or pursuit. (5) This explains the statement here that the defeated Sodomites, who escaped from the field of battle, betook themselves to a mountain. And it is supposed that among the fugitives thus secure from the Elamite attack was the king of Sodom. (6) It is worthy of notice that in the solemn woe on Mount Olives the Lord employs this figure in connection with the Roman armies: "Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Luke xxi. 21). See also Rev. vi. 15.

"Ah! what terror is impending
When the Judge is seen descending,
And each secret veil is rending."—*Celano.*

Rescue! Ver. 13. (1) In the last century, when absence of trains and existence of bad roads isolated English towns and villages from each other, and from London, the separation of friends became a serious matter. A young maiden persuaded her relatives to allow her to leave the remote western hamlet home and to visit friends of the family in the metropolis. After a time tidings came that the maiden had been carried off, and was supposed to be concealed in the hall of a northern baronet. Distressed at the tidings, and full of love for their sister, the two brothers considered how her rescue was to be achieved. Ascertaining the whereabouts of the hall, they decided to explore its buildings in disguise, so as to learn the precise apartment in which their sister was lodged, and then, under cover of night, to secure her freedom. (2) Lot had chosen to go to the neighbourhood of the friendly citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. Four northern potentates make an incursion southwards, subdue the five princes in the Vale of Siddim, and carry off Lot, his family, and goods. A fugitive servant bears the sad tidings to Abram, who—full of love for his captured nephew and household—considers how their rescue is to be accomplished. The conqueror's track must be first ascertained, and then, under cover of the darkness of the night, an attempt to rescue must be made.

"Around are the nations, and enemies strong;
But God is our fortress, our strength, and
our song."

Prayer-Power! Ver. 13, etc. (1) Naturalists say that at times when the eagle is about to soar, he seeks, finds, and puts himself upon a column of uplifting air; and thus, by its upheaving power, he is borne until he finds himself at the height at which he aimed. (2) When the Lord Jesus was about to enter upon that struggle on Calvary, by which captive humanity was to be rescued and restored to moral freedom, He sought the column of uplifting communion with God in Gethsemane; and thus was able to rise to the lofty summit of the Cross, and achieve a glorious victory. (3) We can hardly conceive Abram doing otherwise here. Happy is that soul which, entering on any spiritual expedition in behalf of others, places itself upon the uplifting breath of prayer, and thus is borne safely and securely on the tide of successful effort: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" "Up, for the Lord hath delivered them into thine hand."

"Go, fight the battles of your Lord,
But not with helm, or spear, or sword;
Take ye the Christian's panoply,
And sing, 'Not unto us, O Lord.'"

Christian-Enterprise! Vers. 13, 14, etc. (1) In the far East an Arab sheikh heard of the capture of his kinsman, chief of another Arab tribe, and of his being carried by his captors across the desert. His affection for his kinsman, to say nothing of the Arab sense of honour which required him to make some effort for his kinsman's safety, prompted him to summon a few of his bravest tribesmen, hurry after the spoilers to the verge of the terrible desert, fall upon them, and rescue his depressed kinsman. (2) Abram does not do so on the mere impulse of natural affection; he has Divine warrant for what he does. He fights once, remarks Candlish, as he walks always—*by faith*. Isaiah xli. 2 is generally supposed to refer to Abram's course here; and if so, the testimony is explicit as to the Divine sanction given to Abram's enterprise. But, apart from this, the subsequent benediction of Abram, and the vision and promise in chap. xv. establish clearly that he went forth by the express will of God. (3) Christians have gone forth on enterprises for which they had no warrant; and they have brought shame on the Christian faith—as when Zwingle buckled on armour and went forth to die on the battle-field. It has even been suggested that Coligny yielded to do in France for the oppressed Huguenots what he felt was at variance with the Divine will. And missionary enterprise against the powers which have carried our fellow-creatures captive in their minds and morals, senses and souls, should never be ventured on, except with prayer to know the Divine will, "Shall we go, or shall we refrain?"

"'Gainst sin, the world, and Satan all,
And every foe, both great and small
This great crusade of faith and love,
Is owned and blessed of God above."

Union and Obedience! Ver. 14. (1.) In the Island of New Guinea is the bird of paradise, whose tail is a magnificent plume of fairy-like feathers, partly white and partly yellow, so that they resemble silver and gold. Wallace says that the king bird is distinguished by spots on his tail, and generally flies high up in the air above the flock. Every one keeps an eye upon their leader, obeying his guidance with startling exactness. (2.) Naturalists refer in a similar manner to the herds of deer among the savannahs of North America. The buck-leader of the herd is distinguished by his remarkable antlers, and by the position which he assumes in the herd. All the members of the herd keep a constant watch with eye and ear upon their leader, and follow his lead with unity and completeness. (3.) Abram seems to have had similar unity and submission amongst his servants. The moment he signals an advance and attack all are ready. And so ought the followers and servants of the Lord Jesus to follow Him with absolute exactness, implicit confidence and ready allegiance. As the birds and beasts keep an eye upon their leaders, so should we be ever looking unto Jesus.

"Temptations throng on every side;
We overleap them all;
Fight the good fight of faith, and hear
Our glorious Captain's call."

Dan-Laish! Ver. 14. (1.) This place becomes prominent in the time of the Judges. It was near Paneas on the way to Tyre, not far from the mound now called "Tell-el-Kady." Thomson says that not one habitation is there now. The fountain still pours forth its river of delicious water. Herds of black buffaloes wallow in its crystal pools; and in vain does the traveller look for the maiden with her pitcher. The site of the town cannot even be examined with satisfaction, so dense is the jungle of briars, thorns, and thistles which overspread the country. (2.) The mention of the name "Dan" here has caused much discussion. We must suppose that either the "Dan" of Abram's pursuit was another place than the "Dan" of the Judges; or that the more modern name has been substituted for the more ancient one in the sacred text. Neither of them is impossible in itself. "Dan" may have been the name of a place in the time of Abram, and the word "Jordan" (river of Dan) may have been employed because the Jordan sources were beside "Dan." Thither Abram sped in pursuit of the marauding hosts of Elam.

"Along the steep, above the dale,
And o'er the mountain wild,
To where dear Jordan's fountain's rise,
And Hermon's snows are piled."

Abram's Pursuit, etc. Vers. 14-16. In the Far West, a white man with his daughters left the white settlements and pitched his block house near the village of a friendly Indian tribe. Highly esteemed by all, it was with regret and misgiving that the white settlers saw the family disappear in the trackless wilderness of wood and water. A distant Indian tribe, whose chiefs had long been at variance with the friendly tribe of Indians, resolved on an attack upon the village. Successful in their raid, they spared the white man and his daughters, but carried them off with all their cattle and chattels. One of the white man's servants, absent at the beginning of the attack, arrived as the triumphant Indians were setting off on their return home, and hastened off to the distant settlements to give the alarm. Eager to rescue their esteemed friend and his family, the settlers and hunters started in pursuit. For days they tracked the Indians, and at last reached the camp, which was now within easy reach of the villages and wigwams of the predatory tribe. Ignorant of any pursuit, and revelling over their spoil, the Indians retired to rest; when the settlers, suddenly breaking in upon the camp, attacked and scattered the foe, and delivered their white friend and maidens. Christian champions have their deeds of heroic rescue to achieve.

"Dark places of the soul and sin,
Dark places of the earth to win;
The inner shrine of man is trod
By foes of man, and foes of God."

Faith's Trial and Triumph. Ver. 15. (1) This incident presents to us the Father of the Faithful most vividly apprehending things to come. The tidings brought by the fugitive from Siddim's Vale were a test of Abram's faith, as to whether he had grasped the promise in chap. xiii. "To thee will I give this land; therefore, arise, walk up and down as its undoubted, destined heir." This is the victory of faith. While as yet Abram has not a foot of ground which he can call his own, he assumes, with all the calmness of undoubted sovereignty, the right to act as the heir of the land. And he goes forth in the full assurance of faith, that victory shall be his. (2) When the first missionary reached the centre of Africa and gazed upon the wondrous scene, he felt that the kingdoms of the country were surely to become the possession of Christ. The eagle eye of Divine faith looked down in calm conviction upon the powers of darkness and heathenism, and saw the captive souls delivered from their bondage, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in their right mind. All Christians thus venture forth against the powers of hell—strong in faith—confident of victory against opposing foes.

"Faith whets the sword; faith is our shield;
Faith keeps our armour bright—
It makes us more than conquerors,
And then is lost in light."—*Maguire.*

Attach! Ver. 15. (1) Chardin says that the Arabs, when desirous of pillaging a caravan crossing the eastern deserts follow it day by day until a favourable opportunity occurs for a night attack. Then they silently fall upon the camp, and carry off one part of it before the rest can get under arms 2) Mayne Reid describes how a party of hunters thus followed a retreating band of Indians, until it separated into two bands. The white pursuers then followed the band, which carried off the white woman whose rescue they were after; and, waiting until night, burst upon the band, and rescued the captive. (3) Harmer supposes that Abram fell upon the Elamite camp at Laish much as the Arabs did and do; and so, by unequal forces, accomplished the deliverance of Lot. There can be little doubt that it was by a sudden night attack that Abram was able, with so small a following, to overcome the vast, veteran hosts of Elam.

"Not now such fields of earthly strife
Demand the Christian warrior's life;
The moral fields of warfare stand
In every heart—in every land."

Sodom Sinners! Ver. 16. (1) Amongst those who were delivered by English arms from the oppression and cruelty of the West African chiefs, were a number of natives who still remained heathen. These shared in the deliverance; but for them *alone, or even chiefly*, the expedition would never have been undertaken. White and native Christians claimed and enjoyed the interposition of England: the others were partakers of the deliverance—no more. (2) Abram delivers Lot and his family. That the men of Sodom shared for a season in the benefit of that deliverance, was an incidental consequence; at least, was not the main and primary purpose of Abram's interposition. It was not for their sakes that the pilgrim became the warrior, but for that of Lot, who, however far he had strayed, was a servant of God. (3) In achieving the moral deliverance of His kinsfolk by the Lord Jesus, the ungodly are often partakers of the temporal blessing. The deliverance is not wrought for their sakes but for that of His own, whose souls are in peril; but even His enemies are benefited in the liberty wrought for His own. Yet, they do not share in the *spiritual benediction*, so long as they persist, as the sinners of Sodom. And the temporal deliverance is like that of Sodom, *a respite*—a fresh lease of mercy's forbearance, ere heavier doom of fire falls.

"When in majestic splendour He will rise,
With judgment and with terror on His wings."

Return Home! Ver. 17. (1) Ships, which have been parted by night, and the swift stroke of the tempest, come hurrying back at morning to their anchorage. What anxious inquiries follow as to the perils of the past night! What mutual felicitations ensue as they discover that all are safe in spite of the storm! (2) The meeting between Lot and

Abram, the princes of Sodom, and their rescued warriors, must have been full of agitation and excitement. When their hosts were defeated, and Lot's family carried off, there was little prospect, humanly speaking, of a happy reunion. Now they are safe home again. (3) Christians are scattered and carried off by the marauding bands of death; but the Captain of our Salvation delivers them from the power of the grave. They shall meet again in the "King's Dale" at Salem, for Jerusalem which is above is free. What mutual congratulations and recognitions will then ensue! How all will unite in praising their Deliverer; in whom

> "Majesty, combined with meekness,
> Righteousness and peace unite,
> To insure those blessed conquests,
> His possession and full right;
> Ride triumphant,
> Decked in robes of purest light."

Abram's Authority! Vers. 17-24. (1) In early days, when the white man first appeared amid the vast pinewoods and hunting grounds of the Red Indians, some of these red children of the wild were possessed of the conviction that the new-comers would by-and-by be owners of the soil. No doubt this was largely due to the consciousness of their keen Indian perceptive powers that the "white foreigners from over the water" were in many respects superior to them in intelligence and resource. But there was also a premonition, the origin of which was doubtless due to supernatural influence, that the "white man" was to possess the Indian's land. Hence some of these Indians became the fast friends of the early settlers. (2) In the time of Abram certain of the Canaanite leaders were impressed with the conviction that this "pilgrim-pastor" would be the future lord of Palestine. Apparently Abimelech and Hamor had some such presentiment, that Canaanite ascendancy would give way before the Abrahamic posterity. Under supernatural conviction of a similar character the King of Salem comes forth to greet the deliverer of Lot on his return from the pursuit and overthrow of the four kings.

> "Stay, pilgrim warrior, on thy road,
> Refresh thy strength awhile;
> Here is the banquet of thy God
> To soothe thy warfare-toil."

Melchizedek and Salem! Ver. 18. (1) Stanley refers to the Jerome tradition that Salem was not Jerusalem, but a smaller town not far from the scene of the interior in the "King's Dale." He appears for a moment, and then vanishes from our view altogether. It is this which wraps him round in that mysterious obscurity which has rendered his name the symbol of all such sudden, abrupt apparitions—the interruptions or dislocations of the ordinary succession of cause and effect and matter of fact in the varied stages of the history of the Church. (2) Candlish says that whether this Salem was the city which afterwards became Jerusalem, or some other place near the Vale of Siddim and the River Jordan, does not appear. Nor, indeed, is it the precise locality, but the name, which is important. It was the King of Righteousness and Peace whom Abram acknowledged in the very height of his own triumph, when he accepted Melchizedek's hospitality of bread and wine.

> "When the patriarch was returning,
> Crowned with triumph from the fray,
> Him the peaceful King of Salem
> Came to meet upon his way."

Melchizedek Meeting! Vers. 18-20. (1) Stanley says that the meeting of the ancient chiefs of Canaan and the founder of the chosen-people in the "King's Dale," personifies to us the meeting between what, in later times, has been called Natural and Revealed Religion. He adds that Abram's receiving the blessing from Melchizedek, and tendering to him reverent homage, is a likeness of the recognition which true historical faith will always humbly receive and gratefully render when it comes in contact with "Natural Religion." (2) Law says that in Melchizedek we have a figure, not of "Natural Religion," but of Christ the Messiah. He is the true Melchizedek, without beginning of days or end of years. Abram, the weary warrior, typifies the soldiers of Christ, for whom refreshment is provided by their Royal Priest of Salem, which is peace. The fight of faith is fierce, the journey of life ofttimes long, but our true Melchizedek comes forth with the solid sustenance of the Word, with the overflowing cup of promise, with the spiritual food of His own body and blood.

> "Good soldier of the Cross, well done!
> Press forward more and more;
> And still forgetting things behind,
> Reach forth to things before."
>
> —*Maguire.*

Shaveh-Shadows! Ver. 18, etc. (1). The faith of Jonathan burning bright and pure in his father Saul's corrupt court is a lovely sight. In the interview between Jonathan and David, we have, as it were, the noble warrior handing the torch of royal trust to the son of Jesse. This was done in faith, "I know that God will establish thee king." (2). Melchizedek seems thus to come forth and meet Abram in the "King's Dale." By his heroism of faith, Abram has shown his readiness to enter upon the rights and trusts of Canaan: and Melchizedek, as the preserver of the old primitive patriarchal hope, comes to surrender the charge to Abram. (3). It is as if the torch was here visibly handed over from the last of the former band to the first of that which is to succeed. The interview between the two is the connecting link between the two dispensations—the one of which is waxing old, and the other of which is just beginning to appear. (4). It is like aged Simeon embracing in his arms the infant Saviour; the last patriarch and prophet of the law not departing till he sees and hails the new-born hope of the Gospel arising on the world with healing in His wings. (5). It is the lingering twilight of declining day in the Northern climes mingling with the dawn of a better morn. Both Melchizedek and Abram understood it thus. As debtors to the same grace, they realise that their actions now are shadows of good things to come. Both see Christ in all, and in the eye of their faith Christ is all in all.

"Though the altar has crumbled, and incense
has ceased,
True worship still rises, through JESUS our
PRIEST."

Disinterestedness! Ver. 22, etc. Canada has become a kingdom in fifty years. Its large cities were then little hamlets, and its mighty forests then covered its virgin soil. Near its lakes a gallant soldier had retired and settled; and around him had gathered a few brave hunters. They were surrounded by Indian tribes, who, partly from respect and awe, refrained from attacking this happy settlement. One of the white men, eager to find a wider field, left the hamlet, and took his family to the hunting ground and village of one of these tribes. Another tribe sacked the Indian village, carried off the leading chief, his wives and flocks; and at the same time took away the white man's family and property. When tidings reached the gallant head of the white settlement, he armed his servants, pursued after the retreating Indians, surprised them in their sleep, and brought back the captured white and red men. On arriving at the Indian wigwams again, the grateful Indian chief urged his deliverer to take the rescued cattle. The white leader, animated by those noble motives which blossom so sweetly where Divine Grace reigns, and anxious to shew the "Red man" what Christianity does for the white man, refused to take one hoof or horse: "Give only to those who volunteered to join me in the rescue; as for myself and friends, we are content with your deliverance and safe return home."

"The conflict's past, the fight is o'er,
The victory is won;
And we are more than conquerors
Through Him, who says "Well done."

God's Honour! Ver. 22. (1) In the South Sea Islands a missionary had undertaken a perilous enterprise for the sake of securing the freedom of a chief's wife, daughter, and goods, carried off by a hostile chief in his absence. By mediation and persuasion the missionary was successful in bringing back again the prisoners and property. The grateful chief, conscious that the life and liberty of his family could not have been secured by himself and followers, urged the missionary to accept the goods as a reward, but in vain. Anxious to impress upon the chief and natives the unselfish character of Christianity, the servant of Christ refused all reward. (2) When the patriot-general of Benhadad appeared with flesh like the flesh of a little child, after his sevenfold plunge beneath the waters of the Jordan, his grateful heart desired to make a generous recognition of the prophet's interposition. But Elijah, jealous for the honour of God, and desirous of favourably impressing Naaman's mind as to the character and religion of Jehovah, refused all recompense. It is true that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel, but there are seasons and circumstances when for the honour of God all rewards should be steadily refused.

"Death may dissever the chain,
Oppression will cease when I'm gone;
But the dishonour—the stain—
Die as I may, will live on."—*Moore.*

Oaths! Ver. 22. (1) As humanity had to become accustomed to a mutual reverence for truth and fidelity, it was natural that the use of oaths should be (1) frequent, and (2) forcible. There were three prominent classes of oath—1. The Simple kind, when a private individual would confirm something in a sacred manner by his own voluntary action. 2. The Severe kind, when, by way of adjuration, one sought to compel another to confess the truth, or observe a command solemnly laid upon him. 3. The Solemn kind, which was employed in the making of contracts and forming of alliances, and of which we have frequent illustrations in Scripture and Ancient History. (2) Abram's oath probably belongs to the first of these classes. It is singular that a similar custom obtained amongst the South Sea Islanders, and even amongst the ancient Indians. Roberts mentions that, doubting the faithfulness of his Arab guide and chief, Hassan lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by "*Allah*" that he would be true, vigilant, and faithful. This custom prevails most among nations where falsehood is common. It is remarkable that the Irish—and especially the Roman Catholics—are unusually profuse in the use of those oaths in which the Divine Name is emphasised.

"In every tale they tell, or false or true,
Well known, or such as no man ever knew,
They fix attention, heedless of your pain,
With oaths like rivets forced into the brain."
—*Cowper*

Thread and Latchet! Ver. 23. (1) Roberts thinks that this may refer to the red thread worn round the neck or arm, and which binds on the amulet; or to the string with which females tie up their hair. The latchet, he supposes, means the thong of the sandal, which goes over the top of the foot, and betwixt the great and little toes. 1. It is alluded to twice in the Old Testament—here and in Isa. v. 27. In Isaiah it is referred to as a necessary requisite for rapid locomotion;

while here it is spoken of as something valueless. Similar proverbial expressions have been in use in all countries to denote comparative unworthiness. Abram clearly employs it as an emphatic expression, signifying his resolute decision to accept of no return from Sodom's king.

> "Set honour in one eye and death i' th' other,
> And I will look on both indifferently;
> For let my God so speed me, as I love
> The name of honour more than I fear death."
> —*Shakespeare.*

Faith and Figure! **Verses 18 and 22.** (1). Abram returns victor. The hour of victory is the chosen time for the trial of faith. But the Prince of Salem comes and refreshes the weary warrior. Thus strengthened, Abram is proof against all the seductions of the king of Sodom. Strong in faith, the pilgrim refuses the proferred friendship of the king of Sodom. (2). The rulers of the darkness of this world, successfully opposed in one form, meet us in another. Opposition to one form of evil brings us sometimes very near to other evil. If the king of Shinar is overcome, the king of Sodom is at hand, seeking the man of faith. But strong in the strength which God supplies through His eternal Son, he is able to refuse even a thread or a shoe-latchet. (3). We have this exemplified in the life of the Son of Man Himself, who, when victor over the powers of evil, was invited to enter into alliance with the world. It is likewise the experience of the Church of Christ. Triumphant over one confederation of evil, the Sodom powers of corruption have humbly proferred their friendship and gifts. Faith views this as a snare of the wicked one, and scorns the offer.

> "Trust not the moss-grown pleasant land,
> Nor lilies of the field;
> With worldly princes do not stand,
> Nor to their offers yield."

Soldier and Servant! **Ver. 23.** In olden days of feudalism and chivalry, stood a noble Saxon castle, with its wide sweeping plains and woods. One of the retainers, engaged in the work of forester, was attracted by cries of distress towards a cliff, at whose base foamed a river. A glance disclosed to him a human form contending helplessly with the waters, which bore him downwards. Springing from cliff to cliff, and rock to rock, the nimble forester reached the stream, where a stately tree bent half over its waters. Creeping along its trunk, he stooped down, caught and rescued the sinking man. Having brought him to the bank, he succeeded in restoring life to the rescued man, who turned out to be a neighbouring baron. Once more placed beyond danger on the cliffs from whence he had slipped into the torrent, the baron gratefully offered a handful of gold to his deliverer. Drawing himself up, the manly forester pointed with his finger to the lordly castle where his lord dwelt, saying: "My master is able to reward me." As the servant, he looked for his hire to the master. Abram was the soldier and servant of the living God, and to Him he looked for recompense—a stranger's wealth he could not accept.

> "For when my years are ended, and my course
> Of mortal conflict o'er; when the good fight
> Of faith is fought, the Christian warfare done,
> In heaven's bright plains shall be my endless
> benison."

CHAPTER XV.

Critical Notes.—1. **The word of the Lord came to Abram.**] *Heb. There was a word of Jehovah to Abram.* The force of the expression is, that the word efficaciously was; was made to be. This is the first instance in which the phrase, "word of the Lord" is applied to a Divine communication. *Vision.* Chald. *in a prophecy.* Prophets from the earliest times were called "seers." (1 Sam. ix. 9., 2 Sam. xxiv. 11.) *I am thy shield.* The personal pronoun is emphatic. *Thy exceeding great reward.* The LXX renders, *Thy reward shall be exceeding great*, a translation favoured by the Heb. accents. 2. **Lord God.**] Heb. Jehovah Lord. The name Adonai is here used for the first time. It denotes one who has authority; and, therefore, when applied to God, the supreme Lord. *Seeing I go childless. Heb. I am going childless, i.e.,* "I am going out of the world in this condition." *The steward of mine house. Heb. The son of possession of my house. i.e.,* heir, into whose hands Abram's possessions must descend in consequence of his childless condition. *This Eliezer of Damascus.* "Though he is said to have been in Abram's house (ver. 4), yet his parentage was of this Gentile city; and Abram refers to it as conveying a reflection on his forlorn and desolate case. This is commonly supposed to have been the same servant as in ch. xxiv. 2" *(Jacobus).*—3. **One born in mine house.**] This is not to be taken literally; but has the deeper meaning of one attached to, or a dependent of his house—an expression designating the most esteemed servant who was on the way to become his heir. 6. **Believed in the Lord**] *Heb. Jehovah.* "The Heb. term *aman*, from which we have our word *amen*, meaning *to be sure*, and then to be *assured, or confide in.*" *(Jacobus). Counted.* Heb. word signifies to

think, devise, and then *to reckon* or *impute, i.e.*, to set to one's account. Applied also as reckoning iniquity at law (Lev. vii. 18, 2 Sam. xix. 19, 2 Kings xii. 15). *Righteousness*, or justification. **9. Take me.]** *Heb. Take for me, i.e.*, Take and offer for me. *Three years old.* Denoting, say Kalisch, "the perfection of their species." **10. Divided them.]** In this manner animals were prepared for the ratification of a covenant. Hence the Heb. for to make a covenant is, *to cut a covenant.* The custom was to cut the animals intended for sacrifice in two, and then to pass between the parts (Jer. xxxiv. 18, 19, Psa. l. 5). "It consisted in cutting the throat of the victim, and pouring out its blood. The carcass was then divided length-wise, as nearly as possible into two equal parts, which being placed opposite to each other at a short distance, the covenanting parties approached at the opposite ends of the passage thus formed, and meeting in the middle, took the customary oath." *(Bush). Laid each piece one against another. Heb. Gave every one's part, or piece, against his fellow, i.e.*, laid head against head, shoulder against shoulder, etc., so that the covenanting parties might pass between them. *The birds divided he not.* As there were *two* birds, they could be separated so as to make a space between them, without the necessity of their division. It was afterwards commanded in the Law not to divide birds in sacrifices. (Lev. i. 17). Fowls were regarded as mere appendages to the sacrifices. **11. Fowls came down upon the carcases.]** Ravenous birds of prey, such as eagles, vultures, kites, etc., which feed upon dead bodies. **12. Deep sleep.]** The same expression is used of Adam: chap. ii. 21. The LXX has *ecstasy*—a supernatural trance. **13. Know of a surety]** *Heb. Knowing know. A stranger.* This refers chiefly to Egypt; but their sojourn in Canaan, where they lived as strangers, is also included. *Four hundred years.* "400 years is the manner of speech of prophecy, taking the greater and round numbers. It was really 430; see Ex. xii. 40. The devices resorted to in order to produce exact agreement are beneath notice." *(Alford).* **16. Fourth generation.]** "The fourth generation of the Isaaelites who went down to Egypt should return and possess Canaan. This was the result. Caleb was the fourth from Judah, Moses was the fourth from Levi; or Isaac, Levi, Amram, Eleazar, may represent the four generations." *(Jacobus).* "In *the fourth age.* An age here means the average period from the birth to the death of one man. This age or generation ran parallel with the life of Moses, and therefore consisted of 120 years. Joseph lived 110 years. Four such generations amount to 480 or 440 years." *(Murphy). Amorites.* The general name for the Canaanitish tribes. **18. River of Egypt.]** Some suppose the Nile is meant; but to this others object that the region from the Nile to the Euphrates includes a wider dominion than Israel ever attained. Hence it has been conjectured that the reference is to the *Wady el Arisch*, which is called the "Brook of Egypt." "It is true that the domain of Israel never reached exactly to the river Nile. But nothing between them and the Nile was independent of them. Virtually this was the extent; and as *Kurtz* remarks, these two rivers are considered here as the representatives of the two great powers of the East and the West; and the meaning of the promise is, that the land and commonwealth of the descendants of Abram should be independent, and continue by the side of and between these two empires, and that no other empire or nation should permanently bear independent sway in the districts which lay between Judea and these two great empires." *(Jacobus).*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—6.

THE RATIONALE OF FAITH IN GOD.

The central thought here is the faith which Abram had in God, and by which he attained to righteousness. That faith was not the spontaneous product of his soul, but rather the blessed result of God's gracious dealings with him. Faith is not a special creation; it has an ancestry. It is a living thing, and derives its life from other lives. The history of Abram shows that our act of faith implies certain previous advances towards us on the part of God.

I. **Faith in God supposes a Divine revelation.** Abram here appears as a prophet, for he was visited by "the word of the Lord." The Lord revealed to the patriarch certain relations in which He stood to him, and His power and willingness to bless him. We can have no religious faith without a Divine revelation, for faith must have some sufficient object in which to repose. The beginning—the first generating principle of all spiritual religion—is "the Word of the Lord." "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." The voice of God, man's hearkening to that voice, and his belief thence arising—

these are the links in the golden chain of human salvation. God speaks, man listens, and the heart believes. From the nature of the Divine utterance to Abram we learn the character of that revelation which is able to win the confidence of man's heart, and therefore to produce true faith. 1. *We must have a Revelation of a Personal God.* A "word" must come to us embodying a thought of the Supreme Mind. It is not enough that we feel the impressions of some mysterious Power pervading all things. We can have no true faith—in the sense of loving trust and confidence—in an universal Principle of Nature, or in a Force, or in Law. These abstractions are too remote, severe, and relentless for the heart of man. Our souls "cry out for the Living God." 2. *That revelation must exhibit God in loving relations to man.* If God had no merciful designs towards man, no willingness to protect him from evil, or to bestow good, His revealed word could only have the effect of increasing man's sense of helplessness and his misery. That Being who is to win the loving trust and confidence of the human heart must in Himself be lovable. Goodness is the very essence of the Divine nature—the reason of the Divine name. Good and God are only different forms of the same word. The "word" which came to Abram brought him such a message of God as would encourage him to exercise the strongest faith. Not only was God's kindness revealed to the patriarch, but also His sufficiency. Unless there is power to perform, the mere disposition to do good must leave many evils untouched; but kindness allied with might is an effective power of blessing. It was not only as good, but also as all-sufficient, that God revealed Himself to this father of believers. (1) *As able to protect him from all evil.* Man in this world is exposed to many dangers which threaten his comfort and peace of mind—dangers from the malice of the wicked, from natural evils which hurt the body, and most of all from those spiritual evils, which hurt the soul. While he stands in dread of these he cannot perform that loving and cheerful service which should be rendered to God. Fear—in the sense of the dread of some hostile power—paralyses. If man is to serve God in the willing obedience of love he must be assured of protection from all evil. Hence the Divine message to Abram was prefaced with the assuring words, "Fear not." Therefore Abram could hear with a calm confidence the promise, "I am thy shield." God is a defence; and from the comfort of this truth the believer takes courage to perform his duty. This protection is one of the first gifts of God's salvation, and clears the ground for His service. When we are "delivered out of the hand of our enemies," we can "serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life" (St. Luke i. 74, 75). (2) *As a sufficient portion.* Abram was not referred to many sources from which he might expect deliverance and blessing. He was only pointed to one all-sufficient source. All the good which his soul could feel and know was summed up in that one promise, "I am thy exceeding great reward" (ver. 1). He who believes in God is saved from the distressing perplexity of making up the fund of his soul's blessedness out of portions collected from different quarters. There is one fountain of good, for there is one God. When God is "the portion of our inheritance," we can want nothing. Thus the unity of the Divine Nature is the simplification of duty. And it saves the mind and soul from distraction when we have only to look to one Divine source and be blest. He who possesses God has a satisfying reward, and can neither desire nor want more.

II. The act of faith rests upon a Divine promise. To Abram the promise was that he should have an heir, and that his seed should be as the number of the stars of heaven (verses 4, 5). This promise really contained the germ of all human salvation; but in this simple and undeveloped form Abram believed it, and that act is declared by an inspired authority to be an act of faith. At a great crisis in his life Abram cast himself entirely upon God and trusted His word of promise; and though he could not know what immense blessings were hidden in that word, yet his receiving it and acting upon it was genuine faith. The Divine promise is necessary to each act of faith. For—1. *Faith is the present realisation of some good which we hope for.* We rest that hope upon the promise of God; but this is *more than hope* to us, it is a *present reality.* Faith substantiates the promises of God—makes them the solid and fixed possessions of the soul. 2. *Without a Divine promise, faith becomes mere adventure.* We may have a general belief that God is good, but vaguely to trust in that goodness is, in particular instances, of the nature of an experiment, and lacks that joyful confidence which belongs to an act of faith. When we desire some special blessing, unless God pledges His word to give it to us, our prospect of obtaining it is but a mere perhaps, and lacks the solidities of faith. The believing soul feels the sureness of the word of God and trusts it without anxiety as to the result. When God binds Himself by a promise, He comes down to the capacity of His creature, man, and makes faith possible.

III. There are difficulties of faith which God is ready to meet. The promise which God made to Abram became a source of severe trial to his mind. Time was rapidly passing with him—he had well-nigh reached the confines of his mortal day, and the promise was not only yet unfulfilled, but more and more seemed to wear the look of an impossibility. He is afraid that the promise—at least in the shape in which he looked for it—is only too likely to fail. The shadow of doubt seems to have touched his soul. He is bold enough to utter his fears to God. "And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless?" (verse 2.) The one gift which was necessary to make the promise good had been denied. Abram's reason and experience were all against his faith; and for awhile he appeared as one who wished to hold his ground, but did not know how the struggle would end. There are difficulties of faith which may cause doubt, even in those who have believed and whose hearts are, at bottom, true to duty and to God. 1. *Such difficulties are part of our trial in this present state.* Faith would not be the vigorous thing it is unless it was tried with sufficient severity. Hardships and endurance only serve to make it more robust. If all was fully known, plain and clear, present and in actual possession, then, what religious men understand by faith would be impossible. Faith must seek its object through darkness and disappointment. It is God's will that we should pass a portion of our existence in acting upon certain spiritual convictions where we cannot possibly have *knowledge;* and it is part of our trial to be obliged to trust even when appearances are against us. 2. *Such difficulties need not overtask our faith.* God's dealings with Abram show that the trial of our faith, though it may be severe, is not too great for us, "He knoweth our frame—He remembereth that we are dust" (Psa. ciii. 14). Our Heavenly Father meets his believing children in their difficulty and relieves them. He does this—(1). *By not chiding them for their doubts.* God did not blame Abram because he was weary of waiting for the promise, and his faith had begun to waver. He who "upbraideth not" dealt tenderly with his servant. Doubt, when bold and wilful, is a sin; but when forced upon us by the difficulties of our situation is an infirmity of our poor human nature which God will readily pardon. (2). *By giving clearer revelations of His will concerning us.* The promise made to Abram that he should have a numerous seed did not seem likely to be fulfilled in the way which he had hoped. He had begun already to think of some other accomplishment of that promise which yet fell below what would be his natural expectation. "Lo! one born in mine house is mine heir" (ver. 3). But God in mercy revealed His will more clearly, and encouraged His servant by a more definite promise: "This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir" (ver. 4). Thus God supports our failing faith by casting a cheering and revealing light upon His own word.

(3) *By giving confirmation of our faith.* Abram had been summoned to look at the dust of the earth and the sand of the sea that he might gain an idea of his innumerable seed (ver. 5). Now he is bidden to look at the starry hosts of heaven, that he might have a new impression of his vast posterity. A new direction given to our thoughts often freshens the powers of the soul and relieves us. Our light grows clearer and we become more confirmed in our convictions of the truth. The firmament would henceforth have a new meaning for Abram—the bright expression of the covenant promise. God will confirm the faith of those who are sincere so that it shall rise above all difficulties. Both His works and His word will have an ever-increasing interest and significance for us.

IV. Faith in God is man's only righteousness. Abram's faith, under this encouragement, rose into heroic vigour. "He believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness." To believe *in the* Lord signifies much more, and makes larger demands from us, than merely to *believe* Him. We may believe the truth of God's existence and nature, and of the revelation which He has given us, yet this may be nothing more than the assent of the understanding. When we say we believe a man, we assent unto the truth of his statements; but when we say that we believe *in him*, we rise to a loving trust and confidence. We have a delight in his person, we have reliance and trust in his character. So it is with our faith in God. We are assured of His word, and we lovingly confide in it. We are not saved by an operation of the intellect alone; it is the *heart* which believes. This is the essential characteristic of true faith whatever be the degree of light we have. Abram and the patriarchs had not that clear knowledge of Christ and His salvation which we possess, but they trusted their all upon God's word at some great crisis of their lives, and were thus accounted righteous before Him. Faith is ever the same though knowledge varies. Abram trusted in God with the belief of the heart, and this was his righteousness. From his case, we learn—1. *That man has no righteousness of and from himself.* St. Paul takes Abram as a typical instance of the justification of believers, and is careful to show that he had no native righteousness which could procure his acceptance with God. "For if Abram were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory—but not before God" (Rom. iv. 2). Sin has made man altogether helpless in the matter of his salvation. 2. *Man cannot attain righteousness by obedience to the works of the law.* This would require that our obedience should be perfect both in kind and degree, and this it is impossible for fallen man to render. If we regard our obedience as the ground of a *claim* upon God, we shall find that His justice can look at nothing but what is perfect and entire. In the Gospel plan of salvation, God regards the perfect righteousness of Christ and accepts those who believe in Him. Salvation is not the wages of work, but the gift of God. 3. *Man can only possess righteousness by the gracious act of God.* By nature he has it not, nor can he win it. Therefore he can only have it by Divine favour. Even faith is not the meritorious cause of justification, having no more efficacy in itself for this end than any other act of the soul. The very nature of faith is to look beyond itself. Faith is but the instrument which grasps the promises of God, and even that instrument is of Divine workmanship. God must have all the glory in the salvation of man.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. The Lord manifested Himself to His servant Abram—as He has to the human race—by speech. The Bible contains the formed thoughts of the Divine mind.

It would be impossible for us to

attain to any knowledge of God, sufficiently full and clear, unless He reveals Himself. No being can know any other being by study alone. Observation and reflection will give us some information concerning another, but we know very little of him until he *declares* himself. Our knowledge of our fellow-creatures would be scanty and uncertain without the aid of some revelation of man to man. How much more necessary it is that God should declare Himself!

There are four ways in which we may have knowledge of God. 1. By observation. 2. By reflection. 3. By revelation. 4. By faith. It is only by the last two that we can obtain that sure knowledge of God upon which the soul can rest.

The "word of the Lord" came to Abram with a view that it might afterwards be embodied in a life. Such communication had reference to the promised seed in which God, who once spake to our fathers by *prophets*, should speak by a *Son*.

If God had never spoken to man the fact would be so strange and contrary to rational expectation that it ought to be accounted for.

Abram had reason to fear. 1. His enemies, though subdued for a time, might recover their strength and seek to be revenged upon him. 2. He was still a stranger in a foreign land, and the people might combine against him as an intruder. 3. He probably felt that despondency which follows upon the excitement of great enterprises. 4. The promise seemed further from accomplishment than ever, at least in that form in which he expected it.

God's children are first invited to cast their burden upon Him, and thus they are set free for His service.

This first prophecy, beginning to unfold the peculiar history of the Old Testament Church, may be regarded as in some sort parallel to that last Revelation of John the Divine. It is not, therefore, altogether a fanciful analogy which would connect the day here spent by Abram with that on which John records that he was in the spirit. 1. In either case the interview begins with the same gracious words of encouragement addressed personally to the prophet. "Fear not," says "One like unto the Son of Man" to the Apostle (Rev. i. 17). 2. We may suppose that Abram, like John, "heard behind him a great voice as of a trumpet," and turning saw a glorious person, and, seeing him, "fell at his feet as dead" (Rev. i. 10-17). The Lord found it necessary to say to him, as to John, "Fear not." 3. The argument suggested for the removal of this fear is the same in both instances, being simply the gracious manner in which the person speaking discovers himself, and makes himself known. "It is I"—"thy shield and exceeding great reward." "It is I, the first and the last, the Living One." 4. In both cases there is an appeal to the past. "I am thy shield." There is surely here a reference to the battle and victory. Dost thou not know me, Abram? It was I who shielded thee in the battle, and rewarded thee in the victory. Didst thou not forego all other recompense for me? And have not I been thy reward? Even so the risen Saviour reminds His servant John of a deadlier fight and a more illustrious triumph (Rev. i. 18).—(*Candlish*).

Nothing less than a Living, Personal God can satisfy our souls, or allay our fears, as we look out upon the dread realities around us.

I am thy shield. See a like promise to all believers (Psa. cxv. 9-11). The shield is betwixt the body and the thrust; so is God betwixt His and harm. He beareth them as on eagle's wings" (Deut. xxxii. 11). The eagle fleeth with her young on her back; there is no shooting them out through her body. No evil can befall the saints but through God.—(*Trapp.*)

When God is ours we have all that is sufficient for defence and reward. This promise involves eternal life; for men who are brought into such personal relations with God can never die.

1. I, JEHOVAH, the self-existent, the Author of existence, the Performer of promise, the Manifester of Myself to

man, and not any creature however exalted. This was something beyond a seed, or a land, or any temporal thing. The Creator infinitely transcends the creature. The mind of Abram is here lifted up to the spiritual and eternal. (1) Thy shield. (2) Thy exceeding great reward. Abram has two fears, the presence of evil and the absence of good. Experience and conscience had begun to teach him that both of these were justly his doom. But Jehovah has chosen him, and here engages Himself to stand between him and all harm, and Himself to be to him all good. With such a shield from all evil, and such a source of all good, he need not be afraid. The Lord, we see, begins, as usual, with the immediate and the tangible; but He propounds a principle that reaches to the eternal and the spiritual. We have here the opening germ of "the Lord our righteousness," redeeming us on the one hand from the sentence of death, and on the other to a title to eternal life.—(*Murphy*).

Ver. 2. It is allowable to saints to speak their perplexities to God, and to consult Him regarding their future.

Faith may be sorely tried, still the soul may hold its ground if it does not despair of God.

The pious complaint of human weakness *before* God, must be distinguished from the impious murmurs *against* God (Ex. v. 22: xxxiii. 12-15; Numb. xi. 11, 21; Josh. vii. 7).

There is a freedom from exaggeration in the pictures of God's saints which we have in the Bible. Abram shows himself to be thoroughly human in these words of complaint. He was no fanatic or enthusiast. His faith was no easy virtue, but one to which he attained with difficulty.

Sacred history shows us that God's saints, in all ages, have experienced many difficulties in accepting and relying upon His truth. Thus they were not *credulous*, and this fact tends to strengthen our belief in the truth of Divine revelation.

Thus Abram opens his whole heart to God. He has no reserve, and no guile; he does not keep silence when his sorrow is stirred—painfully or sullenly musing when the fire burns (Psa. xxxix.). He does not dissemble or disguise his anxious doubts and fears. He may be obliged to restrain himself in the presence of the weak or the wicked among his fellow-men, who might have no sympathy with his infirmity; but before his God he may lay bare his inmost soul, and make all his thoughts and feelings known. And even if they be thoughts of unbelief, and feelings bordering upon sin—the suggestions of sense and sight contending against faith—the groanings of the flesh lusting against the spirit; better far that they be spread fairly out in the gracious eye of the blessed Lord, than that they be nursed and pent up in his own bosom, under the cover of a cold formality, or in the trembling obsequiousness of superstitious bondage.—(*Candlish.*)

Vers. 3, 4. I have no seed, no fruit; as yet my only heir is this steward born in my house, "this Eliezer of Damascus." Shall he, this spirit of bondage, be the seed? Can this be the promised blessing. Surely there must be something better? So argues faith, even in its depression; and the Lord at once answers that this steward, this spirit of bondage, is not the promised seed: "This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels, he shall be thine heir." Precious words, but no less a trial to the spirit of faith, which against hope believes in hope. —(*Jukes: "Types of Genesis."*)

In the time of the greatest depression of our soul we are often nearest to the attainment of the promises, as the darkest hour of the night is that which precedes the dawn.

God was straight at hand to help Abram's infirmity, and to raise up his faith that began to flag and hang the wing, as the best faith will, if long put to it.—(*Trapp.*)

God speaks to the very point of our fears, and makes known His will more clearly to all who patiently wait for Him.

We can safely leave to God the manner in which He shall fulfil His word. If we only have faith in Him the event will prove to us that His promise fails not.

Verse 5. The worship of the stars, which was one of the earliest forms of idolatry, is here virtually forbidden. God Himself points them out as His works, and is therefore distinct from them as He is from all nature. They may confirm and illustrate God's word, but they are not Himself.

The stars teach us much concerning God. 1. His wisdom and skill. 2. His power. 3. His constancy and faithfulness. 4. His righteousness—by the order and accuracy of their movements. 5. The deep peace in which He dwells, and which He gives to all believing souls. 6. The glory which surrounds God, and which shall distinguish the eternal reward of His people (Psa. xix., Dan. xii. 3).

The promises of God, like the heavens, contain one depth after another, and issue in such glorious things as pass man's knowledge.

As God had commanded him to view the land, and see in its dust the emblem of the multitude that would spring from him; so now, with a sublime simplicity of practical illustration, He brings him forth to contemplate the stars, and challenges him to tell their number, if he can, adding, *So shall thy seed be.* He that made all these out of nothing by the word of His power, is able to fulfil His promises, and multiply the seed of Abram and Sarah. Here we perceive the vision does not interfere with the notice of the sensible world, so far as is necessary (Dan. x. 7; John xii. 29). *(Murphy.)*

The large terms of this promise point to something more than the natural seed, even to the innumerable hosts of those who are of faith, and are therefore "blessed with faithful Abram." In the numberless stars we have a picture of the triumphs of redemption.

Seest thou these hosts of heaven? Canst thou reckon them? No. But He who speaks unto thee, can. He can count them. He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names, and to thee He saith, "So shall thy seed be." Here is the perfection of science—the highest sublimity of the most sublime of all the sciences—the most glorious lesson in astronomy the world ever learned. In the still and solemn silence of earth's unbroken slumber—under the deep azure arch of heaven—not a breath stirring—not a cloud passing—then and there, to stand alone with God, to stand with open eye and behold His works, to stand with open ear and hear His word—His word to thee! These stars, canst thou number them? Look now towards heaven and tell them; these all, I ordained, and even such a seed have I ordained to Abram. Such a lesson might Chaldean sage or simple peasant learn of old; and such far more may be the lesson now, as science reveals her myriads of new worlds, and threads among them her lofty and mysterious way, till the aching sight begins to fail, and the imagination itself to reel.—*(Candlish).*

Abram had good reason ever afterwards to remember God, when he looked upon the starry heavens. It is well for our comfort and the strengthening of our faith, when the sight of God's works brings home some of His promises to us. The works of God have for us those lessons of spiritual truth which we bring to them. The more dealings we have with God, the more do they speak to us of Him.

It is a conjecture besides the scope of the Scripture, though harmless, that by the dust should be signified Abram's natural seed, which are earthy, and by the stars, his spiritual seed, which are heavenly: for the scope of both signals is to answer Abram's doubts about his solitariness, that he had no child, and this God doth by the promise of a numberless seed unto him—as the dust, or as the stars.—*(Hughes.)*

Verse 6. Never till this time had Abram exercised that true and simple faith which rests solely upon the promise of God, and staggers not though there be no present performance, and sense can discover no way out of the natural difficulties which seem to make the accomplishment of the promise impossible. Abram had sufficient religious principle to obey God's command in going to the land which He would show him; and the promise that God would make of him a great nation had awakened a certain expectation in his breast; but some new experience of difficulties, and of God's dealings with him, were necessary to ripen this into faith. When everything like expectation must have been dead, then faith sprang up within his soul—the principle of a new life.

Faith in God is the soul's victory over the difficulties—1 Of absence. The things believed in are far removed from sight. 2. Of the non-fulfilment of promises. They are still future—beyond and above us. 3. Of seeming impossibilities. Sense declares against the reality of the objects of our faith.

There can be no true faith unless the soul is reduced to that simplicity in which it *looks only to the promise of God.* The believer cannot stand upright unless his eye is fixed in one direction. He is like a man on a great height who must look up, and not down, for that would bring giddiness, which would be his destruction.

From first to last Abram believed in the Lord, and through his faith alone, the righteousness in which he believed being imputed to him, he was accepted as righteous. But, generally, he was called simultaneously to believe and to act; his faith and his obedience were, as it were, combined and mixed up together, and, even to himself, the warrant of his peace and hope might not always be quite clear. It was fitting, therefore, that once, at least, he should be brought into a position in which all ambiguity must necessarily be cleared away, and the simple and glorious truth be made plain and palpable to his soul. Such an era such a crisis, was this precious night on which he stood alone with God under the azure sky—with no possible condition to fulfil, and no work at all to do. God speaks—Abram believes—and all is settled, and all is sure.—(*Candlish*).

The time when faith flames high is the time when we are shut up to the necessity of taking God simply at His word.

The soul can only find rest when we trust in God's promise, not asking how it may be accomplished, or perplexing ourselves with the difficulty of reconciling sense and faith.

The Lord brought the *same* promises before Abram, though in an expanded form. Thus faith has been kept alive in the Church through all ages, not by turning it into sight by means of accomplishment but by the re-assertion of old truths. In the progress of revelation we have but added light upon God's merciful will towards mankind.

And He counted it him for righteousness. 1. From this we learn, implicitly, that Abram had no righteousness. And if he had not, no man had. We have seen enough of Abram to know this on other grounds. And here the universal fact of man's depravity comes out into incidental notice, as a thing usually taken for granted in the words of God. 2. Righteousness is here imputed to Abram. Hence mercy and grace are extended to him; mercy taking effect in the pardon of his sin, and grace in bestowing the rewards of righteousness. (1). It is not of the nature of righteousness. If it were actual righteousness, it could not be counted as such. But believing God, who promises blessings to the undeserving, is essentially different from obeying God, who guarantees blessings to the deserving. Hence it has a negative fitness to be counted for what it is not. (2). It is to trust in Him who engages to bless in a holy and lawful way. Hence it is that in the sinner which brings him into conformity with the law through another who undertakes to satisfy its demands, and secure its rewards for him. Thus it is the only thing in the sinner which, while it is not righteousness, has yet a claim to be counted for such, because it brings him into union with one who is just and having salvation. (*Murphy.*)

Here first, the full importance of faith comes into view. Here also, first, the reckoning of righteousness corresponding therewith. From this point onward, both fundamental thoughts run through the Holy Scripture. (Rom. iv., James ii.) The future of the Evengelical Church was prepared on that night. It was the one peculiar blooming hour of all salvation by faith. But we must not, therefore, so weaken and lower the idea of righteousness, that we should explain it as equivalent with integrity, or in similar ways. Righteousness is the guiltless position or standing in the forum of right, of justice. The forum in which Abram stands here, is the forum of the inward life before God. In this he was, on the ground of his faith, declared righteous, through the word and the Spirit of God. Hence, we read here, also, first of his peace (ver. 15).—(*Lange.*)

Here we learn the high antiquity of Evangelical faith, for *the principle of faith* is the same, whatever be the objects which God promises—land, a numerous seed, or any other blessing. God's promise will enlarge its meaning. Every other good will flow from it as the believer advances in the capacity to receive and enjoy. In the light of an advanced revelation, we find that a land involves a better land, a seed a nobler seed, a temporal an eternal good. Thus God is ever leading His people on to greater and better things which He has prepared for them that love Him.

So ends the trial through the word, while out of the trial faith reaps fresh blessing, even righteousness. Faith takes God to be God, and thus honours Him far more than by many works. And therefore God honours faith, "counting it for righteousness," more precious to Him than gold, yea, than much fine gold. Surely in a world where nearly all doubt God, the sight of a poor barren creature in utter helplessness resting on God's promise must be a spectacle even to heavenly hosts. Even the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth seeking it, and where He finds it He makes Himself strong in behalf of it.—(*Jukes: "Types of Genesis."*)

Though Abram believed God when He left Ur of the Chaldees, yet his faith in that instance is not mentioned *in connection with his justification.* Nor does St. Paul argue that doctrine from it, or hold it up as an example of justifying faith. The instance of his faith which was selected by the Holy Spirit as the model for believing unto justification was that only in which there was an *immediate respect had to the person of the Messiah.* The examples of faith referred to in Romans and Galatians are taken from his believing the promises relative to his *seed;* in which seed, as the Apostle observes, Christ was included (Rom. iv. 11; Gal. iii. 16). Though Christians may believe in God with respect to the common concerns of this life, and such faith may show that they are in a justified state; yet this is not, strictly speaking, the faith by which they are justified, which invariably *has respect to the person and work of Christ.* It is through *faith in His blood* that they obtain remission of sins. He is just, and the justifier of him that *believeth in Jesus.*—(*Fuller.*)

Faith is not—1. The *moving cause* of justification, which is the Divine love, mercy, or grace; and hence we are said to be justified by grace (Rom. iii. 24; Titus iii. 4–7). 2. Nor the *meritorious cause,* which is the redemption of Christ (Rom. iii. 24, 25; Isa. liii, 11; 2 Cor. v. 21). Hence we are said to be justified by Christ (Gal. ii. 17). 3. Nor the *efficient cause.* This is the Holy Spirit (Titus iii. 7). 4. Nor the *instrumental cause on the part of God.* This is His Word, His declarations and promises respecting our pardon (John xv. 3). 5. But it is *the instrumental cause on our part.* This is faith in Christ as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Saviour—able and willing to save (John iii. 16–18; Gal. ii. 16). This implies—(1). That we come to Him (John vi. 37; vii. 37; Matt. xi. 28). (2.) That we trust in Him, as delivered for our offences (Rom. iv. 25)—trust in His blood (Rom. iii. 25). (3.) That we receive Him (John i. 12). (4.) That we trust in God's mercy and promises through Christ (Rom. iv. 17–23). Thus, in different senses, we are justified—by grace, by Christ, by the Spirit, by the Word, by faith.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7–21.

THE CONFIRMATION OF FAITH.

Abram had now that faith by which he was regarded righteous in the sight of God. But faith is only the *beginning* of the spiritual life, which, as in the case of all life, is a season of weakness. Therefore it must be strengthened and encouraged and brought into further development. God graciously confirmed the faith of His servant, so that he might have entire confidence in His ability to accomplish the word of promise. He who gives spiritual life to the soul is ready to give it more abundantly. We may learn from the instance of Abram how, when once we have faith, we may reasonably look to God for the further assurance of it. How was Abram's faith confirmed? The answer to this question will be a guide and comfort to believers in all ages.

I. **Faith is confirmed by the remembrance of God's past dealings.** The soul that has believed has already passed through some stages of spiritual history in all which the Divine goodness and leading were manifest. When faith wavers, or its life is in danger of growing feeble, it is well for us to review the past and to remember what God has been to us. We may use memory to stimulate both faith and hope. This was the use the Psalmist made of the past mercies of God: "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings I rejoice" (Psa. lxiii. 7). The several parts of this act of remembrance may be gathered from God's dealings with Abram in this solemn transaction. 1. *We should call to mind what God is.* Abram was reminded of the majesty, the glory, and unchangeable nature of that Being with whom he had to do. The Lord announced His own awful name, "I am JEHOVAH" (ver. 7). God's name is Himself, and could we learn and know the mysterious secret of it, we should see an end to all our soul's fears. God is the All-sufficient One, and if we but know *that,* we need want no more. But such is the frailty of our nature that we are under the necessity of ever reminding ourselves of fundamental truths. If the life of faith is to be maintained, the soul must frequently cast itself upon God. In the presence of His power and unchangeable purpose of goodness, we can have no fear that His promise shall fail. 2. *We should consider the steps by which we have arrived at what we are already.* Abram, now, for several years was conscious of God's dealings with him. He had ordered his life by God's direction. He had experienced many proofs of His favour, and of His power to deliver in the time of danger. The Lord reminded him of these things. "I am JEHOVAH, that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees" (ver. 7). That journey was long, leading through various prospects, and through paths of chequered experience; but God was with him and led him on. Abram may now confirm his faith by looking at the steps which God had already taken to secure to him the land of promise. Part of the Divine plan had been already accomplished, for God brought him out of Ur that he might give him possession of Canaan. This was surely enough. Will God now falter or fail in the midst of His work, and not go on unto the end? The believer can look back upon all that God has done, and upon all the way by which he has been led, and take courage. 3. ***We should keep that purpose of God*** *before us in reference to which we first exercised our faith.* "I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it" (ver. 7). Abram's attention is called to the *purpose* which God intended for him from the very first. God had promised him the land, and on that word he had ventured to hope and trust. All God's dealings were tending towards the fulfilment of this promise. "I called thee, and promised to bless thee; and whatever may be the darkness of the troubled scene now to be set before thee, it is thy privilege still to know that He who brought thee out of Ur to inherit this land is 'the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever'" (*Candlish*). All God's dealings with believers now tend to the working out of His original purpose concerning them, which is to unite them to Himself and bring them to glory. If we remember what is the *end* of our high calling of God, we have no cause to fear. We have no need to be discouraged because of the way. Our faith, like that of Abram, rests upon the promise of God that He hath provided for us a better place.

II. Faith is confirmed by covenant. The Lord had entered into covenant with Adam and with Noah, but this is the first time that He makes a covenan with Abram. The patriarch needed encouragement. He was not yet in possession of the land which was promised, and the disclosures of the future of his race, which were shortly to be submitted to him, were not altogether cheering. A covenant is granted, not that God requires it for Himself, but for our sakes. We require the definite word, and that it should be confirmed by some act. God thus makes agreement with man, and ties Himself down to conditions. Consider the exact place which this covenant held in the spiritual history of Abram. 1. *It was a token and pledge of God's promises,* not a *concession to unbelief.* Abram desires that his faith should be confirmed by some sign or token. "And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" (verse 8). This request was made *after* he had exercised genuine faith, and had been accounted righteous and accepted in the sight of God. This was not the demand of doubt or of unbelief, made in the spirit of an evil and adulterous generation which seeked after a sign. To require a sign *before* believing, and as a necessary condition of that act, is a sin. It is presuming to dictate to God, as if we had made up our minds not to agree to His terms until we heard them, or until He should come round to ours. But when we first rest our faith upon God's bare word, we then may humbly hope for some token and pledge of His promises. That living thing called faith yet needs an atmosphere constantly renewed, fresh and invigorating. The fitting frame of mind for every child of God is, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." So it was with Abram. He believed, and had acceptance and peace; but the future was dark and he was compassed about with infirmity. "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit the land?" 2. *It was a covenant made by sacrifice* (verses 9, 10). In every covenant, some token or sign must be given as a common point of meeting for God and man. Thus, in the case of Noah there was a sign or token, but this is the first time in which God prepares for a covenant with man with all the formality of a sacrificial transaction. This shows that the gospel idea had now reached a farther stage of development. This transaction pointed to the sacrifice of Christ. Abram's sacrifice was to consist of animals of three years old, which was the time of full vigour. They were to be unblemished, and of the best. Such was "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." He was cut off in the time of his full strength. He was holy, and without spot. He was the flower and perfection of the race—the new and better beginning of humanity. In the tokens of this covenant there are two principles recognised, as bearing upon the great sacrifice for sin. (1.) *That life comes through death.* These animals were slain, as plainly to set forth that death is the consequence of sin. It is also the means of life, for God's covenants convey the gifts of mercy and salvation. Through the death of God's Great Sacrifice we have life. In human experience we have some imperfect analogies to this. The sufferings, and even the death of men, are often the hard conditions securing the good of the race. The death of the mother is often the life of the child. Death for death is the stern requirement of our salvation, but He who saved us had strength beyond the power of death, and rose again for our justification. He brought life from the dead. (2.) *That this sacrifice pointed to a greater whose intent was to bring man into union with God.* The animals were divided, according to the custom in such solemnities (verse 10). The parties were to pass together between the parts of the sacrifice, as denoting that they were thus *at one.* "The unity laid down in the covenant is hereby expressed. The division of the sacrifices into two portions represents the two parties to the covenant. As these portions constitute in reality one animal, so these two parties to the covenant are joined into one" (*Kurtz*). The form of the word "atonement" shows that it signifies that we are made one with God. To knit together again the broken relations between God and man is the great work of Christ. 3. *It was a covenant which was so ordered as to give a further exercise to faith.* When the sacrifice was all made ready, there followed a time of silence and suspense. Abram can only with difficulty keep off the devouring birds of the air which fall upon the divided fragments. He watches anxiously till the close of day, when he becomes weary and falls into a heavy slumber. A mysterious darkness surrounds him. Light at last shines forth out of it, and the symbols of the Divine glory appear, but still the waiting for them was a trial. While mankind was waiting for Christ, it was a time of darkness, suspense, and trial. While the Deliverer was only promised, it was difficult to keep even the most prophetic souls always awake.

III. **Faith is confirmed by a further discovery of the Divine will.** Abram was a prophet, and it was necessary that he should know what was the mind of God, that he might be able to interpret it for the benefit of the Church. It was necessary that God should reveal His will. But the principle still holds good in the case of each believer, that God always rewards obedience by a further discovery of His will. "If any man," says Jesus, "will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." 1. *This discovery was preceded by a revelation of the awful majesty of God.* There was an "horror of great darkness" upon Abram (verse 12). This produced a state of mind which is proper when God is about to grant an audience with His creature. This feeling of awe and horror was often an attendant upon special prophetic revelations (Job iv. 13, 14; Dan. x. 8). 2. *The future was unfolded.* Not for the benefit of Abram alone, as an individual, but for that of the Church. Israel for four hundred years afterwards would have these words to ponder, and even after that to contemplate the still further issues which would be prepared. Of the future, which was here unfolded to the prophet, it may be observed—(1) *That it was not altogether a cheering prospect.* Abram's seed were to be strangers in a land that is not their own, to be condemned to a debasing and cruel servitude for four hundred years. The immediate future of his race was drawn in sad colours. Prosperity would only be granted after many years of grievous trouble. This is a picture of what the Church is, and will be throughout history. Her life is a transcript of that of her Lord's. It was necessary that He should first suffer, and afterwards enter into His glory, and so His church must pass through weary seasons of darkness and trial before she sees full prosperity and enters into her joyful reward. God's revelation does not hide from believers the troubles they may expect in this life. But—(2). *It would be bright in the end.* After a previous affliction for four hundred years Abram's posterity were to be delivered from the House of Bondage (verse 14). The afflictions of God's saints are intended to issue in blessing. The "horror of great darkness" which fell upon the patriarch was a picture of the prospects of his race, which at first were discouraging, but afterwards joyous. God was about to create a people for Himself, and as in the creation of the world so it was here, there was darkness first and then light. This is also the order of the spiritual history of the individual. The new life of souls begins in sorrow, but ends in blessedness. In that prophetic picture of the afflictions of his posterity there were two things which would comfort and assure the mind of Abram. One was *that God would punish the instruments of their affliction*, "Also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge" (ver. 14). Those who afflict God's people bring down upon themselves His judgments in the end. Such is the terrible law of retributive providence as seen in the course of human history. God may use a nation as a rod to afflict His people, but afterwards He breaks the rod in pieces. No weapon that is formed against them can prosper. The Church is too strong to be broken by the powers of this world, for those who have opposed her have either been brought to submission, or have been blotted out of the family of nations. Another consolatary thought was *that there were reasons for the delay of the promised blessings.* "For the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (ver. 16). He who is Lord of all must rule over the wicked as well as the righteous. His longsuffering towards sinners is often a reason why He delays the deliverance of His people. They must abide the time of God's forbearance with those who afflict them. It should reconcile us to the prosperity of the wicked to remember that God allows evil in this world sufficient time to work out its own recompense. It is enough for us to know that what is right and true shall triumph in the end, and what is wrong and false shall be destroyed after it has had a fair trial. The Church cannot enter into her complete reward until the measure of the world's iniquity is full.

IV. Faith is confirmed by the display of the Divine glory. "And it came to pass that when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces" (ver. 17). Here was a twofold symbol of the glory of God. 1. *The Divine glory in the overthrow of evil.* The smoking furnace was a symbol of the Divine wrath, and would represent God's vindictive judgments upon their oppressors. This was the smoke of destruction—the consuming fire of God's anger which burns up all evil. When the Lord comes it will be to take vengeance upon sinners as well as to reward His saints. God is true to His nature when He punishes, for nothing that is unholy can live in His sight. 2. *The Divine glory in salvation.* The burning lamp was a symbol of the light of salvation—of Christ, the Saviour of the world. This is that glory of God, the contemplation of which gives joy. Without this the thought of God would be terrible to the soul. We might admire God's wisdom, and stand in awe of His power and justice; but it is only when we know Him as the God of Salvation that our meditation of Him can be sweet. Our souls could not endure under the awful majesty of God unless we had the comforting light of His salvation. It is observable *that God alone passed between the sacrifice.* Abram had but to stand by and do nothing. He had asked a sign, and must wait for God. The covenant was one of grace, and God must first give before He requires any work on man's part. He alone will have the glory of our salvation.

V. Faith is confirmed by the prospect of a peaceful death, and of re-union with the spirits of the just. Faith in God cannot content itself with the present life. He who is our covenant God is ours for ever, and holds an eternal relation to our souls. Those to whom God gives Himself can never die. The words spoken to Moses, "I am the God of Abram, and of Isaac, and of

Jacob," are quoted by our Lord as a proof of the immortality of man. They imply that the real life of these men had not been extinguished by death; they were all living in the sight of Him from whose eye no human being could wander. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto Him." To Abram, God gave the promise, "Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace" (ver. 15). To go from one place to another, and there to join companionship with others, is not annihilation. It may imply a change in the mode of existence, but the continuity of it is not broken. The Fathers were still living, and Abram was to join their company when God had prolonged his life to a "good old age." He would come slowly and late to the grave, but his end would be peace, and that rest which God grants His people when they have laid down the burden of this life. God confirmed the faith of Abram by promising him this blessedness hereafter. Faith must fasten upon the future. To every faithful believer God gives the promise of a peaceful end, and of reunion with the spirits of the just. 1. *This prospect renders the life of the believer independent of the earthly fortunes of the Church.* The children of Abram, after much affliction, were at length to see prosperity. Abram would not live to enjoy it, and that melancholy thought may have oppressed him. But now he is assured that it shall all be well with himself. His own being was safe amidst all the varied fortunes of his people's history. It is but poor comfort if we only believe in the immortality of the race, and not of the individual soul. Unless we have the blessed prospect of seeing the goodness of the Lord in what is truly "the land of the living," our souls may well faint under the mystery of an existence, which without that blessed hope is meaningless and vain. 2. *This prospect deprives the grave of its terrors.* Abram, like all his fathers before him, must go to the grave, but it would be in peace. He would enter the assembly of those who were living in God's sight. No alarm on meeting God in that world where the soul must be conscious of His presence. Thus faith transfigures that terrible thing, death, and makes it the gate of life. This, the first mention of the grave in the Bible, is cheerful and friendly, because the promise of God lighted it up with the life beyond.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 7. In that early age of the world the name of God was no mere designation of some mysterious Power, of which men were vaguely conscious, nor was it a convenient abstraction, but a solemn reality to those simple-minded but earnestly religious souls who used it. That name signified what God was, and who.

Enough for faith to know that God is by necessity what He is. This knowledge affords a stable centre where the heart can rest, and the intellect can afford to wait for such increase of knowledge as God may be pleased to grant.

He saith unto him—God expressly making out his mind to Abram—*I am Jehovah* who now speak unto thee, who was, is, and is to come, who calls that which is not as if it were, and can make to be what and when I please; so that thy faith need not stagger concerning anything that I speak unto thee. All being is within the compass of mine.—(*Hughes.*)

In this passage, God does seem to lay emphasis on his name, Jehovah, notwithstanding what is said afterwards: "I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah was I not known to them" (Ex. vi. 3). Nor is there any real inconsistency here. It cannot be meant in that passage that the name Jehovah was literally unknown to the patriarchs, or that God in his intercourse with them never appealed to it. The idea rather is, that as God appeared in their days chiefly in the giving of promises, whereas in the time of Moses He appeared to fulfil them, His attribute of power was that principally concerned in the former case, and His attribute of faithfulness in the latter. The patriarchs had to look to Him as God Almighty, able, in due time, to accomplish all His promises which He was then giving them. Moses and the Israelites were to know Him as Jehovah, unalterably faithful after the lapse of ages, and fulfilling His promises given long before. Still, it does not follow that the view of God implied in His name Jehovah was altogether concealed from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; or, that it was never used to impart to their souls strong consolation and good hope through grace. On the contrary, the Apostle, writing to the Hebrews, expressly tells us that to Abraham God sware by Himself; or, as he explains it, in support of His unchangeable word, appealed to His unchangeable nature or name. (Heb. vi. 13-18.) And if, on any occasion, His name of immutability was likely to be thus used, it was at the opening of such a revelation as this.—(*Candlish.*)

The record of God's gracious dealings with His saints is an encouragement to all who shall hereafter believe. Hence the value of sacred biography.

What God had already done for Abram ought to strengthen and confirm his faith. 1. God brought him out of the land of his birth, which was defiled by idolatry. 2. All the events of his life were working towards the end contemplated by the promise. 3. God had deposited in his mind the seeds of religion, which would grow into a church.

Let the remembrance of what I have done for thee confirm thy confidence, since every former mercy is a pledge of a future. God giveth after He hath given, as the spring runneth after it hath run. And as the eye is not weary of seeing, nor the ear of hearing, no more is God of doing good to His people. "Draw out thy loving kindness," saith David (Ps. xxxvi. 10, marg.), as a continued series or chain, where one link draws on another to the utmost length.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 8. The same request may be made with two different minds. Zacharias (Luke i. 18) asked this in unbelief; the Blessed Virgin (Luke i. 34), as Abram here, in faith, humbly yearning for further assurance. God, who sees the heart, answers accordingly.—(*Alford.*)

Abram grants God to be Jehovah, showing that his faith was still strong. The sign was needed, not for his own sake, but for the sake of his posterity, who might be tempted to despair on account of the slow realisation of the promise. In His dealings with individual saints God has often in view the future welfare of His Church.

Many instances are recorded where God has been graciously pleased to give signs to His people for the confirmation of their faith when there was not any doubt upon their minds respecting either His faithfulness or power. When He appeared to Gideon (Judges vi. 14-21), and told him that He should deliver his country from the yoke of Midian, Gideon said, "If now I have found grace in Thy sight, then show me a sign that Thou talkest with me." In answer to which, God caused a fire to come out of the rock and consume the kid and cakes which Gideon had prepared for Him; and presently afterwards (Judg. vi. 36-40) He gave him another sign, making the dew to fall alternately on the fleece and on the ground, while the other remained perfectly dry. In the same way He gave to Hezekiah a choice of signs offering to make the shadows on the sundial go backwards or forwards ten degrees, according as he should desire. (2 Kings xx. 8-11.) From hence it appears that the inquiries which proceed from faith are good and acceptable to God.—(*Bush.*)

Even where faith is real it has a right to seek for its full assurance.

He desires a sign, not that he believed not before, but that he might better believe. How great is God's love in giving us sacraments, and therein to make Himself to us *visible* as well as *audible.*—(*Trapp.*)

We should be anxious to make our

inheritance in the heavenly Canaan sure. It shall be given to those for whom it is prepared, but we may well be concerned as to whether we ourselves shall have part or lot in it.

Verse 9. Abram must be prepared for the revelation which God was about to give him, by being reminded that he was not fit to approach God, except through an appointed way of mercy.

The outward signs of our faith, and the means of our redemption, are not left to man's device. God Himself appoints them.

The animals prescribed are of the three kinds afterwards allowed by the law for sacrifice; and the birds are those repeatedly mentioned in the law as those to be brought for offerings. The animals were to be each three years old, denoting the perfection of their species. But we Christians cannot shut our eyes to a deeper symbolism in this sacred number, especially when we remember that this part of the covenant symbolism was to be "for ME," *i.e.*, to signify God's part of it. (*Alford.*)

The soul believes that it shall be even as God has promised, but it does not yet understand how or through what experiences the blessing is to come. In answer, therefore, to the promise it says, "Whereby shall I know," etc. The Lord replies by a command to sacrifice, and in this worship and sacrifice His way is manifested. Beside the altar light breaks in. Faith may be strong while yet in outward things; but light comes while we stand before the Lord, by the holy altar of burnt-offering. At every stage we prove this. Noah is taught much beside his offering. (Ch. viii. 20–22.) So, too, is David in later days. (Psa. lxxiii. 16, 17.) Abram, no less, by the altar learns the reasons for the delay in the possession of the inheritance. There is opened the experience of his seed; there again the covenant is renewed and added to. (*Jukes: "Types of Genesis."*)

Verse 10. The universal Eastern custom was to divide the sacrifices, as Abram did, and *both* the contracting parties passed between the halves. Here one alone of the parties, Jehovah, thus passed. Abram's part of the covenant was the obedience of faith; and God on account of this entered, He, the righteous God, into bond with Abram, thus made a contracting party with God, and therefore accounted righteous. (*Alford.*)

In the Gospel covenant the only-begotten Son passes through between God and us. Christ gathers together in one all those things which sin has sundered and scattered.

Verse 11. Having made ready the sacrifices, he waited, perhaps, for the fire of God to consume them, which was the usual token of acceptance. But meanwhile the birds of prey came down upon them, which he was obliged to drive away. Interruptions, we see, attend the Father of the Faithful in his most solemn approaches to God; and interruptions, though of a different kind, attend believers in their devotions. How often do intruding cares, like unclean birds, seize upon that time and those affections which are devoted to God? Happy is it for us, if by prayer and watchfulness we can drive them away, so as to worship Him without distraction.

Evil thoughts have a terrible power to come down upon us and enter our minds, even when we are able to shut out other influences.

Evil thoughts, unless we make an effort to drive them away, must spoil our sacrifice, which should be kept pure.

No sooner are the bodies of the beasts offered, and the parts laid open before the eye of God and the worshipper, than the fowls came down to mar the offering. So when the believer has set before him the sacrifice, and in the contemplation of it would fain learn to see and feel with God, the fowls, "evil spirits in heavenly places," powers within or without subject to the wicked one, messengers of "the prince of the power of the air," come to distract our communion. He that has stood beside his offering knows what distractions these winged messengers cause, while we rise up like Abram to drive them away.—(*Jukes: "Types of Genesis."*)

CHAPTER XVI.

Critical Notes.—1. Handmaid.] This term is used in the LXX. and N.T. in the sense of a female slave. Hagar was a bondwoman, and according to ancient usage was entirely at the disposal of her mistress. (Gal. iv. 22.) *An Egyptian.* She probably entered the family of the patriarch during his sojourn in Egypt, and may have been one of the "maid-servants" presented to him by Pharaoh. (Gen. xii. 20.) *Hagar.* Flight, or a fugitive. The Arabs term the flight of Mohammed *Hegira*—a word derived from the same root. It is not likely that the name was given by her parents, but was bestowed afterwards in commemoration of the leading events of her history. **2. I may obtain children by her.]** *Heb.* I may be builded by her. In Heb. the ideas of building and the raising of a family are closely allied. *Ben*, a son, is derived from the verb *bana*, to build. (Deut. xxv. 9, Ruth iv. 11.) **5. My wrong be upon thee.]** *Heb.* My wrong lieth upon thee; *i.e.*, the wrong which I suffer. *The Lord judge between me and thee.* "I made the offer to thee, but the deed was thine; let God apportion the blame between us." *(Alford.)* **6. Dealt hardly.]** *Heb.* Afflicted her. The word is too strong to indicate merely the employment of sharp and reproachful expressions; acts of oppression are intended. **7. The angel of the Lord.]** This remarkable title occurs here for the first time in the O.T. Here it is evidently to be understood of God Himself. (Ver. 13.) God, who is Himself invisible, visited her under the appearance of an angel, the Angel of the Covenant—the Second Person in the Blessed Trinity who has ever manifested God to men. *Alford* regards this identity as probable, but not to be held as an ascertained fact:—"We know who it is that is the shining out of the Father's glory, and the expressed stamp of His Deity (Heb. i. 3), even the Divine Word, who is the Declaration of the Father to man. (John i. 18; xiv. 9.) But the more we feel this in our hearts, the more lightly and reverently should such thoughts be touched. It has not pleased God positively to declare to us that it was the Divine Son who was present in these Divine appearances, and therefore we should not on our parts positively declare, nor build systems upon it." *Shur.* "Hagar seems to have made her way towards Egypt, as if aiming to return thither. Her route lay from Hebron, through the wilderness of Shur, which stretched from the south-west corner of Palestine to the head of the Red Sea. There is a caravan road through this wilderness or desert to this day." *(Jacobus.)* **9. Submit thyself.]** *Heb.* Humble, or afflict thyself. This is the same word which occurs in ver. 6, and is there rendered "dealt hardly with." **10. I will multiply thy seed exceedingly.]** *Heb.* Multiplying, I will multiply thy seed. Thus the Angel claims to be God. **11. A son.]** "The hope of a Hebrew household lay in the *son*, as the representative of the family name, and the protector and perpetuator of the family line. A daughter was held in small estimation among the Orientals." *(Jacobus.)* *Ishmael. Heb. God will hear;* or as it is interpreted immediately, *God hath heard.* The LXX. has, God hath given heed to thy affliction. The Chal. *Hath received thy prayer.* Targ. Jon. *Thine affliction is revealed before the Lord.* This is the first instance of a name being given by Divine direction *before* birth. **12. A wild man.]** *Heb. A wild ass man.* Targ. Onk. *A wild ass among men.* "The raving fierceness of the wild ass of the desert is described. (Job vi. 5; xxiv. 5; xxxix. 5, 8. Psa. civ. 11; Isa. xxxii. 14.) The A.V., by omitting the central word in the sentence, loses altogether the point in the prophecy." *(Alford.)* *His hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him.* As this could not be literally true of any individual man, we must have here the prophetic description of a race. The Ishmaelites (whose representatives are the modern Arabs) were and still are noted for their frequent quarrels amongst themselves. One of their national proverbs is, "In the desert everyone is everyone's enemy." *And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.* The *Heb.* for "dwell" signifies "to dwell in tents." This is still the manner of life of a portion of the Arab tribes. *In the presence of* is interpreted by Delitzsch as rather meaning *to the east of*, but Kalisch, and other commentators, render as in the text, and understand it as describing "the wide and almost indefinite extent of territories through which the Bedouins roam, so that they seem to be everywhere before the eyes of their brethren." *(Alford.)* **13. The name of the Lord.]** *Heb. The name of Jehovah. Thou, God, seest me. Heb. Thou art the God of vision,* or rather "of visibility"—who dost cause Thyself to be seen—dost manifest Thyself. *Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me? Heb. Have I here seen after the vision;* or, *The back parts of my seer—of Him who saw me.* (Ex. xxxiii. 23.) The general sense is plain—"Thou art still to me a God whom I, yet unpunished, saw: for, although I saw Thee, I still live and see the light of day." **14. Beer-lahai-roi.]** "The fountain for the life of beholding." The name embodied the idea of the last verse. It was the well of seeing God, and yet living. *Kadesh and Bered.* It is said that the site of this well has lately been discovered. Its present name is *Mai-lahhi-Hagar*. *Mai* means water, being equivalent to *Beer*—a well. It lies twelve miles from Kadesh. Near it is a ruin, now called *Beit Hagar* (House of Hagar). A full account of this discovery is found in Williams' *Holy City*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–3.

FORESTALLING GOD'S APPOINTED TIME.

Both Abram and Sarah had long been waiting for the fulfilment of God's promise. They were sorely tried by the delays of Providence, for they were both far gone in the vale of years and the promised blessing had not come. Their hearts grew sore with hope deferred. In their impatience they seek by methods of their own to fulfil God's word—to anticipate His time and purpose. They attempt to cross the ways of Providence with the lines of their own wisdom, and frantically to hasten their destination. This was their weakness; for God has His appointed time and way. Man's duty is calmly to wait.

I. This may be the temptation of those who yet have faith in God. Abram and Sarah had the assured possession of God's promise. They knew what was its meaning—that it pointed to a definite blessing. They believed in their hearts that the will of God concerning them, as so expressed, would be accomplished. Yet they are weary with waiting, and use an expedient of their own, as if they would assist Providence. Faith may be genuine, and yet betimes prove unsteady through the severe trials to which it is exposed. Faith has to seek its object through clouds and darkness, through delays, disappointments, and dangers; and it is therefore not surprising that it occasionally betrays weakness, or takes some unadvised step. The grace of God is pure and strong, but the results of it are modified injuriously by human infirmity, so that they fall beneath absolute perfection. Sarah, who is most to blame in this history, is yet declared by inspired authority to be an example of faith, and is classed among those renowned believers who all "obtained a good report through faith" (Heb. xi. 11, 31).

II. Such a course appears to have a rational warrant. The conflict between faith and reason is not the growth of modern times, but one as old as human nature itself. The attempt to hasten the work of God by plans devised by our own wisdom can be defended on many plausible grounds. A sincere man must, in some way, justify such a course to himself, and reason can always aid him. Thus, a believer may unconsciously challenge Divine wisdom, while he thinks all the time that he is doing God's service. The conduct of Abram and Sarah was capable of some defence on rational grounds. They were sincere, and no doubt their plan appeared to them right and reasonable. 1. *There was no human hope that the promise would be accomplished in that form in which they first understood it.* Abram thought that God would shortly give him a son, and Sarah expected to be the mother of the promised child. But Abram had now dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. He was already an old man, and his wife had been hopelessly barren for upwards of twenty years. They both still clung to the promise of God, and believed that in some way it would be accomplished. But now there was no human hope that the promise would be fulfilled in that precise form in which they first expected it. Therefore they might reasonably imagine that God had some other way for making His Word good, and that, by using the means which their own wisdom suggested, they were but working out His plan. Abram was assured that He should have an heir, of his own body begotten: but there was no distinct promise that Sarah should be the mother (Gen. xv. 4, 5). In supposing that the blessing might be conveyed through another channel, they did not appear to be departing from the literal construction of the original promise. 2. *They were conforming to the common custom of the country.* In the East, such expedients were resorted to for perpetuating the household when all other hope seemed to be gone. "It was a method of raising a family by proxy, and it was a virtual *adoption* of the vicarious posterity—the concubine was said to bear the child 'upon the knees' of the wife" (Gen. xxx. 3).—[*Jacobus.*] They were only adopting methods which they never heard spoken of with censure, and which seemed to be justified by the necessities of the case. 3. *The end they sought was worthy in itself.* They were assured that, in some way, mighty nations should spring from them—above all the Promised Seed by whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. It was not base passion that prompted them, but a noble desire to fulfil their exalted destiny. They may have employed a questionable policy, but on Sarah's part, at least, it involved some high moral qualities—generosity, self-denial, and zeal.

III. **All attempts to be beforehand with Providence imply an infirmity of faith.** Faith may be real and yet show weakness in the time of great trial and perplexity. A really strong faith looks to the promise, and to that alone; leaving the ways and means for its accomplishment entirely to God. Such was the nature of Abram's faith at first until he was betrayed into weakness by his wife. All human anticipations of God's time and purpose, which He Himself in His wisdom has exactly determined, are wrong. 1. *They are signs of impatience.* Faith has not only to believe the promise of God and to repose a loving confidence in Himself, but also patiently to wait for Him. Waiting is as much a part of our religion as believing. It is the proper attitude of the soul in this state of probation. The trial of our faith worketh patience, and, when patience fails, faith is in that degree impaired. 2. *It is not our duty to aid God in the accomplishment of His promises.* God knows the whole case, and He has power and wisdom to fulfil His gracious purpose. We are but partial and imperfect judges of the ends He has in view and of the fittest means for attaining them. There is but one path plain and clear to us—the path of present duty. We have but to follow that path, for it is the only certainty upon which we can rely. God will take care of the end, and cause us to realise what we have believed. Faith in duty is faith in God. "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. xxviii. 16). He shall not make haste to fulfil God's promises, but rest in them meanwhile, and patiently wait the appointed time. True faith imparts a certain modesty to the habits of the soul. The attempt to assist Providence by the contrivances of our own short-sighted wisdom is presumption. 3. *Religion hereby degenerates into fanaticism.* In the history of religion fanaticism has chiefly assumed this form, viz., that men strive to realise God's purposes before their time, and by means which show the hasty, intemperate zeal of short-sighted mortals, and partake not of the solemn and measured progress of the Divine plan. As God's *power* is most seen *in space*, through which His works are scattered, so His *wisdom* is developed throughout the course of time. The attempt to force His purposes into unnatural ripeness is the very essence of fanaticism. Of such a nature is the communist theory of a perfect and contented human society, and those human anticipations of God's kingdom on earth which were indulged in by such as the Fifth Monarchy men. 4. *Such an interference with the means by which God accomplishes His purpose shows a want of confidence in His power.* Faith has one great resource when perplexed by present appearances, and that is the power of God. With Him nothing is impossible. It might, after all, have been God's design to show forth His power in a most marvellous manner by giving strength to Sarah to conceive at a time when it was naturally impossible. The delay might have been only for the purpose of showing forth His great power by the distinct evidence of His working. When the strength of nature decays, the power of God is most manifest. The faith of Sarah had in it an element of distrust, for it showed a want of confidence in the power of Him who quickens the dead, and calls the things that are not, as though they were. (Rom. iv. 17, 18.)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. God held Abram long in suspense. The difficulties of faith are acknowledged in Scripture.

The faith of true believers may be exposed to a long trial, which may oppress the heart with a settled sorrow.

God's providence may place natural difficulties in the very face of His most solemn promises.

God's promises and covenant can scarcely maintain faith in His children against the discouragements of sense.

St. Paul, in the Galatians, dwells upon the name of *Hagar*, as being the name of Mount Sinai in Arabia, denoting the legal position. And it would seem that Sinai was so called because Hagar, in Arabic, signifies *a rock*. (Gal. iv.) And this incidental fact St. Paul uses to show the relation between the legal and the Gospel dispensations, and between the two classes of children in Abram's house—the spiritual seed being those of Sarah (the free woman), represented by Isaac; the carnal being those of Hagar (the bondwoman), represented by Ishmael. Hagar represented the Mosaic Sinaitic dispensation, and her children were born in bondage to the law (Judaising), and yet, according to nature, having the husband; while Sarai typified the Gospel system, and represented the Church, long barren, till the gift of a progeny—the miraculous seed—according to promise. (*Jacobus.*)

Hagar, an Egyptian. Egypt stood then in the same relation to the covenant people as the world does now to the Christian Church. In their anxiety, believers are tempted to avail themselves of the provisions of the world instead of quietly waiting for God.

The things of faith are distant and mysterious. That which the world offers is near and clear. Egypt furnishes a ready solution; but God's thoughts are above man's thoughts.

In all their wanderings, the influence of the world follows the children of God, and becomes a constant source of trial and danger.

Verse 2. Sarai attributes her barrenness to the will of God. (Ps. cxxvii. 3.) It is a noble form of faith which traces back all the events of the world to the highest cause; finds the origin and disposition of all things in the energy of a Living Will.

It is possible to acknowledge God's power, and yet by our conduct virtually to deny it.

The virtue of a good confession may be well-nigh destroyed by those actions which really contradict our creed.

All the promises made to Abram depended upon "one who is to come forth out of his own bowels." Such is the Lord's express assurance, and yet he goes childless. His wife, as she herself represents the matter to him, is barren; and it would seem that she is contented to acknowledge her barrenness as hopeless, and to acquiesce in it as a dispensation of God. She does not speak angrily or impatiently, as Rachel did to Jacob, but meekly and submissively she says, "The Lord hath restrained me from bearing." It is His will, and His will be done. But surely God can never intend that my barrenness should frustrate His purpose, and make void His promise. There must be some way of getting over this difficulty, and reconciling this apparent inconsistency between the promise that to thee a child is to be born—in whom, as the Great

Reconciler, thou and thy posterity, and all the kindreds of men are to be blessed—and the Providence which allots to thee a barren, and now aged, spouse. There must be some new expedient to be adopted; some other plan to be tried. It may be that Sarai is to be a mother, as it were by substitute and by proxy, and is to obtain children by her maid; according to the custom already common. And if there be any hesitation about the lawfulness of the course recommended, may it not be justified by the manners of the country sanctioning the usage; by the entire absence of every grosser motive—the end sought being not self-gratification, but the higher good of himself, his children, and the whole human race; and by the necessity of the case, which shuts him up to some such plan? In circumstances so urgent and unprecedented, why should one so favoured and blessed of God have any remaining scruple? It is, in all views of it, an extraordinary position that he occupies; and what he does is not to be judged by common rules. Such was Abram's temptation. (*Candlish.*)

Unbelief is very prolific of schemes; and surely this of Sarai is as carnal, as foolish, and as fruitful of domestic misery as could almost have been devised. Yet such was the influence of evil counsel, especially from such a quarter, that "Abram hearkened to her voice." The father of mankind sinned by hearkening to his wife, and now the Father of the Faithful follows his example. How necessary for those who stand in the nearest relations, to take heed of being snares instead of helps one to another! The plea used by Sarai in this affair shows how easy it is to err by a misconstruction of Providence, and following that as a rule of conduct, instead of God's revealed will. "The Lord," says she, "hath restrained me from bearing," and, therefore, I must contrive other means for the fulfilment of the promise. But why not inquire of the Lord? As in the crowning of Adonijah, the proper authority was not consulted.—(*Fuller.*)

There is a stage when grace itself, and the promise of fruitfulness which is connected with it, by acting on our impatience, may so excite as to lead the spirit of faith to try carnal means, even though for ends which God has promised. Indeed impatience, a zeal for God, without a corresponding faith in the zeal of the Lord of Hosts, is ever leading to this. Even to faith it is hard to wait on God, and let Him do His own work in His own way. Thus did Abram hearken to Sarai; and thus excited even by the truth, and with right ends, does the elect yet try his own resources. Christ the true seed is by many longed for ardently. Both in the Church and world we fain would see Him. But He tarries. Then Sarai speaks to those who, though men of faith, are so far from "being as dead," that they are still full of self-will. The result is one scheme after another, all aiming to obtain the promised seed, by doing rather than by dying. Vain hope! Ishmaels enough may be thus gotten. Isaacs are not so born.—(*Jukes: "Types of Genesis."*)

Abram's temptation was similar to that of Jesus in the wilderness. 1. The temptation of Jesus had reference to a previous declaration of God. The voice from heaven, at His baptism, had declared that He was the Son of God. Therefore Satan rests his temptations upon that word. "If thou be the Son of God." 2. Jesus was tempted to employ plausible means to secure His own preservation and advancement. Thus, to turn the stones into bread to preserve His life—by casting Himself from a pinnacle of the temple, to seek an extraordinary interference of Providence, and so attract public attention—by aiming at the world's throne lest the world should give Him nothing but a cross. To Christ, therefore, we must look for a perfect example of uniform and complete resistance to temptation. Abram, as all other human examples, do but most serve for a beacon to warn us.

Nature may throw difficulties in the way of faith, but faith should be able to see through nature and behold God who is above it. The soul can only "endure as seeing Him who is invisible."

Verse 3. Human experiments for reconciling sense and faith are possible. But God's purpose cannot in this way be discovered.

There may be a self-sacrifice, in itself praiseworthy, but of no value in the sight of God because He does not demand it. To offer up a service to God, suggested by our own short-sighted activity, and when He does not require it, is of the nature of will-worship.

It is easy to persuade ourselves that we are carrying out the will of God, and acting up to the requirements of true religion, when we are only showing a fanatical devotion to an idea.

Faith in God may require long and patient waiting for Him, but there is no need that we should be anxious as to how He intends to accomplish His will.

Sarai, the wife of Abram, was undoubtedly a godly woman. She is commended as an example to all Christian matrons, who are her daughters as long as they do well. She "obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord." With him she came out from among her idolatrous kindred, and with him she was willing to lead the life of a stranger and pilgrim. During all the ten years which they had spent in the land of Canaan she was constantly and faithfully with her husband, sharing all his trials, and witnessing all the great things which the Lord did for him. She was heir, together with him, of the grace of life, and one by whom his prayers were not wont to be hindered. (1 Pet. iii. 7.) Strange and sad, that at such a season, and from such a quarter, temptation should arise; that after a ten year's walk with God, in the very height of privilege, in the full assurance of faith, the faithful companion of his pilgrimage and the helper of his joy should beguile and betray him! After such an instance, who can be secure?—at what season, or on what side, secure?—(*Candlish.*)

"After Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan." This clause is here thrown in as if to show the pressure of discouragement under which Sarai acted in this matter. Abram, after so long a sojourn in the land, yet remained *childless.* He was now eighty-five years old, and Sarai seventy-five. She was to be to Abram "*for a wife*"—to serve the purpose of a wife in this extremity. By the custom, the children of the concubine became the offspring of the wife herself, being regarded as obtained by proxy, and in a vicarious, substitutionary way, so that they were reckoned as hers by adoption. (Ex. xxi. 7; Deut. xxi. 10.) Abram might have felt himself at liberty to accede to this proposed arrangement, inasmuch as nothing had been said of Sarai in the case. So the Hebrews have viewed Abram's conduct. The slave girl was at the disposal of the mistress—her personal property—according to the oriental custom; and it was only by the consent of Sarai that she could become the secondary wife of Abram. And this step was taken for a declared purpose, and to fulfil the promise of God. But the wrong was in the unbelief which could not trust God to work out His own plans and to fulfil His own promise without such human device. Sarai herself would soon see the wrong, and reap the bitter fruits.—(*Jacobus.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 4-6.

THE EVILS OF ABOLISHING SOCIAL DISTINCTIONS.

By the elevation of Hagar from the condition of a bond-servant to that of a wife, her relation to Abram's family was changed. This sudden advancement to a superior position brought new complications into the patriarch's household. The evils of abolishing social distinctions receive a sad illustration in this narrative. The same great principles which are at work here apply to all times, though the external facts which spring from them are endlessly varied. All sudden and violent changes which disturb the foundations of human society are fraught with manifold inconveniencies and dangers. Some of these may be seen in this history.

I. **Those who are suddenly raised in the social scale are tempted to pride and insolence.** Sarai makes the complaint to her husband: "I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes." Hagar's new position in the household, and her possession of that fruitfulness which was denied to her mistress, made her boastful of the superior advantage, and she became proud and insolent. She reproaches the very person who had been the means of her advancement. Those who are not fitted by natural endowment and training for the higher stations of life are injured and exposed to many temptations by being suddenly forced into them. By a healthy ambition, plodding industry, and laborious self-culture, a man may greatly raise himself in the social scale. But this is a different case from that of those who are *suddenly* raised by the action of others whose aim is to make all men equal by means of violent changes in human society. Such forces directed towards the new adjustment of the social state can never maintain it in a condition of equilibrium. It is like the attempt to cause the surface of water to assume that of an inclined plane; when the constraining force is removed the water falls back to its original level. Human experience has proved that, in many cases, the morals of men have been entirely changed by their sudden exaltation to place, power, or wealth. They become full of conceit, and are scornful and reproachful towards others. The position of Hagar was not given her from any particular regard for herself, but in order to serve a special purpose. She mistook the grounds of the favours bestowed upon her. This has ever been the delusion of those who have been advanced from humble stations by the artificial regenerators of society, who only cared to serve their own selfish ends, and have but regarded the poor and lowly as steps along which they might climb to power and importance.

II. **Those who have taken part in the abolishing of such distinctions are the first to complain of the evils caused thereby.** Sarah herself proposed the elevation of Hagar to this honour, and she is the first to complain of the bitter evils which this false step had brought upon her. This has often been repeated in the history of mankind. Men have been forgetful of God's order, and have tried to reconstruct society upon a new basis. Then they find that they have plunged themselves into unforeseen complications and troubles, and like Sarah—1. *They complain of their troubles so as to excuse themselves.* Sarah throws the blame upon her husband. "And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee." Men cling to the consolation that the evils from which they suffer are not due to their own conduct. The last thing they can be brought to do is to charge their evils upon themselves. Thus sinners who reap the reward of their own doings peevishly blame Heaven for their misfortunes. When a man by his own folly has perverted his way, then his heart fretteth against the Lord. 2. *They often make rash appeals to divine justice.* "The Lord judge between me and thee," said Sarah to her husband. There is an appeal to Eternal Justice which is quite becoming in pure and strong souls when the oppression of human injustice lies heavy upon them. Job could appeal to his Vindicator on high, who would redress his wrongs and assert his integrity. But rash appeals to Heaven are mostly the sign of a weak cause. Men hide their own evils from themselves and others, and seek a passing comfort by claiming the consolations of the just. To invoke God seems, for the time, to put an end to all strife and to leave the matter with Him. Thus religion is used by some as a sanctuary whither they flee in the time of trouble. They use it only in emergencies. Many of those who have tried to anticipate God's time by precipitating His purposes towards humanity, have to the last appealed to Heaven in vindication of the justice of their cause.

III. **The recognition of original rights is the best way of dealing with such evils.** Abram does not dispute the matter with his wife, but meekly says, "Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee." (Ver. 6.) He takes no side, nor does he defend, as he might consistently have done, the just rights of Hagar in her new position. He refers back to Sarah's original rights as mistress of the household, as his wife entitled to his affection, and as one who had the sole disposal of a servant who was still her property. Times have changed since then, the paid servant having succeeded the bond servant; still, the policy of Abram may be recommended to those who are called upon to act in similar domestic and social complications. 1. *This is a better course than the immediate imputation of such evils to those who have caused them.* It is sometimes better to quiet such disorders by presently using gentle means. To go at once to the bottom of the evil, and to apportion blame to those to whom it properly belongs, may cause irritation. Even a righteous reproof may be given at a wrong time, and in circumstances unfavourable to its success. Peace is sometimes better than vindication. 2. *Meek submission becomes true might in the end.* Meekness was the only treatment which was suited to a mind enduring the tortures of self-reproach. The time for calm reason would come, when that meek spirit which endures evils rather than give offence would gain the true victory.

IV. The evils brought about by sudden and violent changes in the social state are never fully remedied. Abram by his yielding spirit appeased the anger of his wife, and cut off all further occasion of quarrel. But he yielded too much. Hagar, indeed, was the bondmaid of Sarah, and, according to the usage then prevailing, her property; still she was in some sense the wife of Abram, and entitled to his protection. He ought not to have given her up entirely to the will of a passionate and jealous woman. But things could not be exactly as they were before in Abram's household. A false step had been taken, and though the evils it caused might be mitigated yet they could not be wholly undone. When once social usages and relations are disturbed, the reformation of the evils caused thereby can only be partial.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 4. The success of our schemes in gaining our own immediate ends is no sure indication that God approves of them.

The most abject, when placed in positions where their natural advantages give them a superiority over others, are the most tempted to pride.

The results of our own presumptuous anticipation of God's time and purposes soon show themselves. By our short-sighted wisdom we often set a snare by which our own feet are taken.

Solomon says that "an handmaid that is heir to her mistress" is one of those things for which the "earth is disquieted" (Prov. xxx. 23).

If carnal strength succeeds in bearing any fruit, the immediate result is contempt of better things. For the flesh can achieve nothing without being exalted. Sarai, therefore, instead of being "built up," as she hoped, by Hagar, reaps through her fresh humiliation. —*(Jukes: "Types of Genesis.")*

The jealousies, the heart-burnings, and mutual reproaches which we now find disturbing the peace of his pious family, are such as might have been anticipated from the course of policy unhappily pursued. That the Egyptian bondmaid, so strangely and suddenly honoured, taken out of her due place and station and admitted to the rank and privileges of a spouse, should forget herself and become high-minded, was precisely such conduct as might have been expected on the part of a slave treated as Hagar was, and having a temper unsubdued and a mind uninstructed, as Hagar's probably were. She could not enter into the plan which the heads of the house had formed, or into the reasons and motives which led them to form it. To their servant, if not to themselves, it must have been fraught with a vitiating and corrupting tendency; and assuredly it did prove to her a temptation to insolence and insubordination stronger than she could withstand. Hence Abram and Sarai had the greater sin. There was a cruel want of consideration in what they did. Even if they felt that they were at liberty, so far as they themselves were concerned, to do it, and that they were safe in doing it, were they not bound to ask how it might affect their dependent, whom they made a party in the transaction? Is not this the duty of all heads of families? Alas! how is it discharged! Do parents and masters—do the heads and members of households among Christians—duly weigh and recognise their responsibility in this particular? Do you, we might say to them, in all affection—do you, with special reference to this consideration, apply the maxim, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things edify not?"—*(Candlish.)*

Verse 5. There is often a sad reaction which follows an over-strained zeal. Those who have been driven to adopt insane schemes of policy, when their own failures are brought home to them wildly impute the blame to others.

We cannot disturb the settled order of society, even when the end proposed is good, without producing serious evils.

We are too ready to blame others for those misfortunes in which we have taken the chief part in bringing upon ourselves. Passion dulls the moral perceptions of the soul.

Being now made to reap according to that she had sown, she begins, when it is too late, to repent of her rashness. But instead of condemning her own conduct, and confessing that her folly had recoiled upon herself, she turns the edge of her resentment against her husband. Had the good man formed a deliberate design of injuring and insulting her, she could not have employed harsher language. Indeed, her conduct throughout was that of a peevish, unreasonable, and disappointed woman; and its weakness and wickedness are aggravated by her appealing to God in a case where she was clearly and consciously in the wrong. As if she had taken it for granted that her husband would not hear her, she exclaims: "The Lord judge between me and thee!" Such hasty and passionate appeals to heaven, instead of indicating a good cause, are commonly the marks of a bad one. A truly serious spirit will pause before interposing the name of God on any occasion, and will shudder at the thought of employing it on a false or frivolous one. —*(Bush.)*

When evils come upon us, we often regret them merely because of their sad consequences to ourselves. There may even be a sorrow for sin which is not "after a godly sort."

We can only retain our true dignity and power by quietly waiting for God's time.

He must not be sent for all in haste to decide the controversy, who, if He had come, you may soon see which of them would have had the worst of it. The best, we see, have their domestic contentions; some household words will now and then pass betwixt them; we match not with angels, but men and women. Two flints may as soon smite together, and not fire come forth, as two persons meet in marriage and not offences fall out. Publius Rubius Celer was held a happy man among the Romans, that commanded it to be engraven upon his gravestone that he had lived three and forty years and eight months with C. Ennia, his wife, *sine querela*, without the least quarrel. *(Trapp.)*

We may with confidence appeal to

God when our conscience is clear and our cause is just; but to do so in the spirit of rashness and peevishness, in order to relieve our passionate temper, is impiety.

Verse 6. As Abram's faith was tried on other occasions, so here is a trial to his spirit of meekness—to the power of Divine grace within him in maintaining his temper amidst the provocations of domestic life.

How to meet quarrels. 1. By a calm demeanour. To catch the contagion of the passion and rage of others is to impair the accuracy of our judgment, and to make ourselves partakers of their evils. 2. By recognising whatever rights those who quarrel with us may have on their side. Abram acknowledged the fact that Hagar belonged to her mistress and was entirely at her disposal. 3. By meekly yielding to the weak when there is no prospect of bringing them to a rational mind. Sarah was the "weaker vessel," and it was of no use, in that state of her temper, to reason with her upon the whole question. It is better to turn away wrath by a soft answer than to prolong a hopeless struggle.

Abram is tempted to carry too far his indulgence towards one who is apparently to realise his anxious longing; and under this natural feeling, has he become less sensitive than otherwise he would have been in regard to her whom he should honour, and more tolerant of disrespect or insult shown to her? We may gather this from Sarai's complaint; for she would not probably upbraid her husband without a cause. And if it were so, how sad an instance we have here of the difficulty of stopping short when a single doubtful step is once taken! Abram, when he consented to the specious proposal made to him, thought that he was acting disinterestedly and for the best. But other and less worthy motives began to mingle with his better purposes; and, at all events, he is now entangled in a net of his own making. He is no longer free; he is a slave of circumstances; and he is compelled to make the best he can of a painful perplexity and hard necessity; to do violence to his feelings, perhaps even to his convictions of duty; and to consent, at last, to the degradation and disgrace of one whom now, after what had passed, he is surely bound, not less in duty than in the current opinion of the age, to consider as having claims upon his regard.—(*Candlish.*)

Abram seems to have been brought into a situation wherein he was at a loss what to do; and thus, as Sarai is punished for tempting him, he also is punished with a disordered house for having yielded to the temptation. And now Sarai, incited by revenge, deals hardly with Hagar—much more so, it is likely, than she ought—for though the young woman might have acted vainly and sinfully, yet her mistress is far from being a proper judge of the punishment which she deserved. The consequence is, as might be expected, she leaves the family and goes into a wilderness. Indeed, it were "better to dwell in a wilderness than with a contentious and angry woman."—(*Fuller.*)

Sarai deals hardly with the bond-maid, who therefore flees the house. If through faith's impatience the principle of law is exalted out of its place, and thus dishonour is done to the free woman, a re-action follows, for Sarai is best loved, and though barren never loses her rightful empire over the believing heart. The spirit of faith at once gives Hagar up, and for a season the bond-maid is lost to Abram's house; the elect permits her to be so abused that for awhile she flees and is lost sight of. Who that knows this path but has seen how the affection of law, when contempt has through it been poured upon a higher principle, is ejected even from that place, where as hand-maid it might be most useful. So does legality lead to antinomianism, and this when law as yet cannot be dispensed with. The time comes, indeed, after Isaac is born, when there is no further need for the bond-maid, and she is cast out for ever. At present the bond-maid is needed. She is therefore sent back by the Lord to her true place as Sarai's maid. For "the law is good if it be used lawfully." (1 Tim. i. 8.) The sorrow comes from exalting it out of its proper place.—(*Jukes: "Types of Genesis."*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7-12.

PROVIDENCE AND THE OUTCAST.

Hagar chooses rather to brave the dangers of the wilderness than to remain any longer under the tyranny of her mistress. She undertakes a wild journey, insensible to the real dangers which lay before her. The extremity of her misery is God's opportunity. His Providence interfered to comfort and console—that Providence which does not desert even the outcast and the miserable.

I. Providence finds them. "And the angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness. (Verse 7.) God brought help to this fugitive and outcast by the ministry of an angel, and He still interferes on behalf of such though the agencies of His Providence are unseen. 1. *There are occasions in human life when the Providence of God specially manifests itself.* The care and concern of God for His creatures is watchful and constant. Infinite power cannot be wearied, nor can infinite skill pause in its designs through perplexity. The action of God towards His creatures never intermits. But from our point of view, there are times when God's providential interference is distinctly manifest. This happens usually in the season of great trouble, when we are driven to our wits' end. When all human resources fail we obtain a more distinct view of the operation of God. By the checks to our happiness in this life we are taught that there is a Power above us. Providence is sure to find us at some time or other of our lives. 2. *That Providence finds us for a purpose of mercy.* Hagar was now at her worst estate, in the most lonely and miserable condition, on the point of perishing in the wilderness. God revealed Himself, not as the lightning's flash reveals the awfulness of a shipwreck, but in order to show His tenderness and compassion. He had "heard her affliction," and sent His angel to comfort and console. In all our wanderings God finds us to the end that He might bring us back to Himself. 3. *That Providence is minute in its care and knowledge.* The angel calls Hagar by *name*; asks her questions, not for information, but to draw out her honest reply, and to produce the feeling that she was specially cared for. (Verse 8.) We think of all the departments of Providence as classes of things and persons over which God exercises care and dominion. It is a necessity of our mind to view the subject in this way, for our knowledge of individuals and particulars is limited. For the convenience of our thought we include much in our words, but the impressions made upon our minds are thereby less vivid. There is no such infirmity with infinite knowledge. God is under no necessity to conceive of persons and things as great *wholes*, but knows perfectly and intimately all the *parts* of which they are composed. He calleth the stars by their names. It is difficult for us to believe in this special knowledge and care of God for us, His dominion being so wide and long, extending over all time and space. Hence the necessity of *revealed religion* to teach us that God's government over all His creatures is not a heartless routine, but proceeds upon an exact knowledge of the condition and wants of each. Without this faith we should feel ourselves but at the mercy of a ponderous machine, whose wheels would crush us if we could not get out of their way. Man, in his misery, might utter a complaint against ruthless force, but could appeal to no heart of compassion, nor behold an eye of regard and pity turned upon him. God's voice must be heard within the soul in tones of mercy, or else the greatness of His majesty would make us afraid. As the telescope shows us God's attention to the infinitely great, so the microscope shows us His care for the infinitely small. It is one of the purposes of revelation to teach us the personal interest which God takes in us. Hence Christ is the Shepherd "who calleth His own sheep by *name.*" (John x. 3.)

II. Providence teaches them. All the ways of God with men are for the purpose of enlightening them with the light of the living. They are intended to impart to us, not that kind of knowledge which satisfies curiosity, but that which is needful to correct our sinful courses, and to teach us our duty. 1. *Lessons of reproof.* "And He said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence comest thou? and whither wilt thou go?" (Ver. 8.) Thus the folly of our own ways is brought home to us, and the dark suggestion of a future, hiding in it unknown troubles, is forced upon our mind. "Whither wilt thou go?" When the past and the future like two gulfs overwhelm us, then is the time to give ear to God if haply we may hear some words of mercy and hope. *In all God's reproofs of our waywardness and folly, conscience approves.* "And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress, Sarai." However we may be pained at them, or rebel against them, we *know* that the chidings of God are just and right, and that sin must end in our destruction. 2. *Lessons of instruction and guidance.* Hagar was told to return to her mistress and submit herself under her hands. (Ver. 9.) Thus it is only in the humble ways of duty that we can fulfil God's pleasure and serve Him. If we have quitted the place of duty, or the place of religious privileges, we must return. Though in such a lot there is much that is unpleasant, and that we would gladly avoid, yet this is our calling of God, and we forsake it at our peril. The Church of God is a home for the lonely and the wanderer.

III. Providence inspires hope in them. Hagar was informed by the Angel that she should be the mother of a numerous race, which was destined to act an important part in the history of mankind. The very name of the son which was to be born to her was to preserve the memory of God's gracious dealings with her. (Verses 10-12.) God cannot impart to us the future in the present, but He gives us what is next to it, that principle of hope which links the present with the future. Thus our soul is sustained amidst the varied trials of life, and we are kept in the attitude of waiting upon God. Without hope in the future, Providence would be a dark enigma. We take refuge in the thought of that goodness which God has *laid up* for us when we are oppressed by the apparent exceptions to His goodness here. All are not called to the same kind of destiny to which Hagar was appointed. It is given but to the few to act the part of principals in the affairs of human history. But God deals with *all* so as to give them an interest in the future. No soul can listen to God's voice and obey His will without being inspired by an unquenchable hope which gives it an interest in all that eternal ages shall unfold. 1. *The lowest and most despised have some purpose of Providence to serve.* God has His plan concerning them also, and they are needed to work out the great designs of His will. They are called to answer some wise and worthy end. God does not design that the life of any creature made in His own image should be aimless. The thought that we have some Divine purpose to serve should inspire us with the hope that a great future is reserved for us. Until God's plan concerning the human race is completed it is impossible for us to estimate the real importance of single lives, however humble they may be in the ordinary view of mankind. 2. *All who have consciously felt the action of a Divine Providence have some memorial of God's goodness.* Hagar was commanded to give her son a name which was ever to preserve the memory of God's compassion in her misery. If we have been made to feel that there is a Divine Providence over our lives, we can recount such instances. God has heard our affliction, and calls us to the inheritance of a noble future. The Angel of the Covenant met Hagar and announced the destined purpose of her life; and Christ now meets the sinner, apprehends him as He did St. Paul, so that he, too, may apprehend the purpose of his high calling.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 7. The Lord finds sinners when they lose themselves.

Egypt, to which Hagar was fleeing, was the representative of the world kingdom. The Angel of the Covenant still arrests sinners while they are on their way to join His enemies. Thus Saul was met while he was bent on his journey to persecute the saints.

Christ often finds human souls, and brings them to Himself, when this world becomes a desert to them and no earthly hope is left.

Abram and his wife were of the family of God—the Church that then was. The Church has, through mistaken zeal, persecuted men and made them outcasts and wanderers. But this cannot shut such out from the Divine mercy and regard.

There are junctures in our lives where God's Providence manifestly crosses our path. It is as if an angel met us. In the wilderness the fugitive meets with a better friend. She wanders on in her solitary way, weary of the heat and toil of travel, and half repenting of the hasty step she had taken. At last she sits down beside one of the fountains of water which, with their little spots of freshness around them, form the grateful resting places for the worn and fainting traveller in the desert, as the burning sun beats upon his aching head, or the shades of evening invite his exhausted limbs to rest. There, as she meditates at leisure and alone, the excitement of angry strife having passed away, many bitter thoughts crowd upon her mind. The pride which sustained her is gone, and her spirit is mortified and tamed. She cannot now find support in justifying herself and blaming others. Her heart is beginning to yearn towards the home in which she has dwelt so long in peace, and which, for all that had passed, might still, through God's mercy, and the mutual forgiveness and forbearance of His erring servants, have proved to her a refuge of holy tranquillity and repose. While feelings like these are swelling her bosom and dimming her eye, a heavenly stranger unexpectedly stands beside her, and a heavenly voice reaches her ear. Trained in the household of one familiar with such divine fellowship, Hagar easily recognises the Angel of the Lord; the Being of whose visits she has heard her master speak.—(*Candlish.*)

The angel of the Lord finds Hagar; that pre-supposes he had sought her (Deut. xxxii. 10). God meets thee in thy desert; He comes to thee in thy conscience; He kindles in thee the sparks into a flame, and comes to thy help in His grace.—(*Lange.*)

Verse 8. When Hagar found her name familiarly called by One who knew her state and occupation, and the purposes of her mind, she must have been impressed that the voice which had spoken to her was more than mortal. When we hear a voice within telling us what we are, and convincing us of the folly of going on in our own way, we know that God has spoken to us.

In calling Hagar "Sarai's maid," he seems tacitly to disallow of the marriage, and to lead her mind back to that humble character which she had formerly sustained. The questions put to her were close, but tender, and such as were fitly addressed to a person fleeing from trouble. The first might be answered, and was answered: "I flee from the face of my mistress, Sarai." But with respect to the last, she is silent. We know our present grievances, and so can tell "whence we came" much better than our future lot, or "whither we are going." In many cases, if the truth were spoken, the answer would be, From bad to worse. At present this poor young woman seems to have been actuated by mere natural principles, those of fleeing from misery. In all her trouble there appears nothing like true religion, or committing her way to the Lord: yet she is sought out of Him whom she sought not.—*(Fuller.)*

By nature we are homeless, and wandering in uncertainty; it is a turning point in our moral history when we can put the question to ourselves, From whence have we come, and whither are we going. Like the prodigal, we have left our Father's house, and we can have no true peace or joy till we return thither.

When God's light shines in upon us, conscience answers faithfully; and though we may be alarmed, yet we need not be dismayed; for that light, though revealing, is kindly.

God never questions us to increase the misery of our condition, but to bring us back to Himself.

She recognises her old and true relation to her "mistress Sarai." This would indicate some softening of her spirit, left, as she was, to her reflection, and cast out upon that dreary desert alone, and now also met by the Covenant Angel, who was ready to counsel her, and to do her good. If her heart was now humbled so as to own her mistress, and cease her proud boasting over her, why might she not return? She would probably have perished on the route of weariness and thirst.—*(Jacobus.)*

Verse 9. The injunction of the angel to Hagar was to return and submit. The reason was, that she had done wrong in despising her mistress, and by her exposure in endangering the fruit of her womb, and now she must be humbled for it. Hard as this might appear, it was the counsel of wisdom and mercy. A connection with the people of God, with all their faults, is preferable to the best of this world where God is unknown. If we have done wrong, whatever temptations or provocations we have met with, the only way to peace and happiness is to retrace our footsteps in repentance and submission.—*(Bush.)*

Religion does not place us above the duties arising from the social relationships of human life.

It is in the humble ways of duty that we can best glorify God. It is enough if we are faithful in that which is least. We should resist the temptation of seeking large places and occasions in which to do our duty.

The angel, in commanding Hagar to return to duty, virtually promised her support and favour under it. All God's commands are really promises to those who obey them. Therefore, we should not hesitate to follow at God's command, though the prospect may seem uninviting.

Abram was to become a blessing to Hagar as he had been to Lot (ch. xii.). It is best for us to dwell with those whom God has appointed to minister to us spiritual good.

The household of God on earth is not perfect. The operations of divine grace are here complicated with human passion and infirmity. Still, this is the place of our greatest safety, and where our souls can thrive best.

The Angel of the Covenant is still inviting wanderers home—calling them out of the wilderness of this world into His own chosen family. It is when we are toiling and labouring for very vanity, with nothing but the wildest chances before us, that He invites us to come to Him.

God's favourable time for speaking to our souls often is in the time of our affliction, when the desert is about us, and every other voice is hushed.

When God appears, it is not for the end that He might gratify our curiosity, but to instruct us in the humble tasks of duty.

Verses 10, 11. In God's gracious dealings with mankind comfort follows counsel.

The angel-speaker here adopts a

style suited only to the Deity, and for Hagar's encouragement, gives her grounds to expect a portion of Abram's blessing, of which she must often have heard—viz., a numerous offspring. This was the prompting of Divine benignity; for it is clear that the language of absolute authority might have been used without any intermingling of gracious promises; but God delights rather to win than to compel the hearts of His people into the ways of obedience.—*(Bush.)*

It was in God's plan to increase the family of Abram in the *Ishmael* branch for Abram's sake. This son is to be trained in the family of the patriarch in order to be capable of obtaining the measure of blessing reserved for him. Here is a memorial in his very name of that Divine interposition to which his life, first and last, would be due. And whether Hagar distinctly prayed to God or not, He heard her groans and sighs, and came to her relief for the Covenant's sake.—*(Jacobus.)*

This is the first instance of a name given by Divine direction before birth, though many such instances occur hereafter. It is remarkable that God is not said to have heard her *prayer*, for it does not appear that she had yet called upon His name. She merely sat bewailing herself, as not knowing what to do. Yet, lo, the ear of mercy is open to what we may term the silent voice of affliction itself. The groans of the prisoner are heard of God, not only theirs who cry unto Him, but, in many cases, theirs who do not. See a parallel case (Gen. xxi. 17).—*(Bush.)*

God is pleased with such memorials as cause us to remember His mercy.

Verse 12. Nations of the most diverse character owe their origin alike to the will of Providence.

Those nations which have become the plagues of mankind may yet boast of manifest instances of God's mercy.

The descendants of Ishmael have been for ages the enemies and tormentors of the Church of God. They have oppressed its children and retarded its progress. Thus the worldly policy of Abram has spread itself out disastrously in human history.

He will be a wild ass which is fierce, untractable, and untameable. And such by nature is every mother's child of us (Job xi. 12) "a wild ass's colt." An ass is none of the wisest of creatures, much less an ass's colt; least of all, a wild ass's colt. Lo, such is man.—*(Trapp.)*

Their character drawn by the pen of inspiration (Job xxiv. 5), exactly corresponds with this view of their dispositions and conduct. Savage and stubborn as the wild ass, which inhabits the same wilderness, they go forth on the horse or the dromedary, with inconceivable swiftness in quest of their prey. Initiated in the trade of a robber from their earliest years, they know no other employment; they choose it as the business of their life, and prosecute it with unwearied activity. They start before the dawn to invade the village or the caravan; make their attack with desperate courage and surprising rapidity; and plunging instantly into the desert, escape from the vengeance of their enemies. Provoked by their continual insults, the nations of ancient and modern times have often invaded their country with powerful armies, determined to extirpate, or, at least, to subdue them to their yoke; but they always return baffled and disappointed. The savage freebooters, disdaining every idea of submission, with invincible patience and resolution maintained their independence; and they have transmitted it unimpared to the present times. In spite of all their enemies can do to restrain them, they continue to dwell in the presence of all their brethren, and to assert their right to insult and plunder everyone they meet with on the borders or within the limits of their domains.—*(Paxton.)*

Every addition to our knowledge of Arabia and its inhabitants confirms more strongly the Biblical statements. These Ishmaelites became formidable in history under the name of Saracens. They marched out to curb the world to their dominion, and to force the nations to their faith; they inundated Persia, the districts east of the Caspian Sea and India; they carried their victorious arms into Syria and Egypt and the interior of Africa; they occupied Spain and Portugal, Sicily and Sardinia, and have beyond their native tracts ascended more than a hundred thrones. Although they sent presents of incense to Persia, and of cattle to Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, they were never subjected to the Persian empire. They are expressly mentioned as independent allies. Nor had the Assyrian and Babylonian kings more than transitory power over small portions of their tribes. Here the ambition of Alexander the Great and of his successors received an insuperable check, and a Roman expedition in the time of Augustus totally failed. The Bedouins have remained essentially unaltered since the time of the Hebrews and the Greeks.—(*Kalisch.*)

God has provided that the separate existence and persistent characteristics of some nations shall be a standing witness to the truth of the early records of Revelation. The Bible has rich evidence in the external facts of human life, as well as in the native excellence and force of its spiritual truths. For upwards of four thousand years has this prophetic voice been made audible to mankind in the history of this people. How lasting is the Word of God!

Those of an alien faith and nation may still be our brethren, for they too can speak of mercies from a common Father.

Before the eyes of civilised nations God has provided evidences of His faithfulness through many generations.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13-14.

THE RETROSPECT OF A SPECIAL PROVIDENCE.

Hagar had heard the voice of the Lord, and had distinct evidence of His providential care and regard. She was appointed to take a remarkable position and importance in the history of mankind. Now, when the surprise of this visitation is over, she has time calmly to reflect upon God's gracious dealings—to take a retrospect of His special Providence, of which two things are here asserted:—

I. That it is a revelation of God. "She called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me." God in His ultimate essence is invisible, and His nature is mysterious beyond the reaches of our souls. But God is pleased to reveal himself to some extent in His works and in human history, and to a still greater extent by a distinct voice from heaven, either as uttered to individuals or as expressed in the language of inspiration. The doctrine of a general Providence affects us languidly; the impression of it is vague; but there are times in our history when the events are so remarkable that it is as if God had spoken. His finger is plainly seen. To Hagar, the thought of this was more vivid; for she heard an audible voice, and saw the form of an angel, which was to her as the face of God. This revelation of God had three aspects. 1. *It was severe.* Hagar was reminded of her fault, and exhorted to instant duty. When God distinctly speaks, there must be a severe element in the voice, because He is holy and His creature is sinful. 2. *It was soothing.* God abounds in mercy, and speaks, not to afflict His creatures, but to assure them of His favour and compassion. But for this, the revelation of God would only alarm us and throw an awful light upon our misery. It is because God "has heard our affliction" that He speaks to us. 3. *It produces the impression that God knows us* (1) *intimately.* Sight imparts most vivid and extensive knowledge. One glance conveys more to the mind than the most accurate and laboured description. God not only sees us, but sees *through* us, and knows us altogether. When we feel that we are thus thoroughly known in the inmost recesses of our soul we recognise the presence of God (2) *graciously*. God sees us for good and not for evil. Were it not for this the thought of His piercing eye would overwhelm us. But the eye that looks upon us is kind. The light of love is in God's countenance.

II. That it should excite amazement and gratitude. 1. *Amazement.* Hagar cried, "Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me?" It was a special privilege vouchsafed by Almighty God to one so obscure and miserable. It was far beyond the measure of His ordinary dealings with mankind. She saw but the hidings of God's face, and yet she wondered that she could still see (*i.e.* live) after the vision. The thought of God when manifestly brought home to the soul is overpowering. It would seem as if when God appears that there is no room for any but Himself—that the glory of the self-existent One would quench all else. God declared to Moses that "no man should see His face alive." (Ex. xxxiii. 20.) Even he could but see the subdued glory of God, and could only endure by a special privilege. This feeling of awe lies at the root of all religion. It is the property of the child-like nature when the feelings are fresh and healthy. Those who affect to be superior to every feeling of awe and wonder put themselves out of sympathy with all that is spiritual and Divine. 2. *Gratitude.* The "well" was called Beer-lahai-roi, or *well of life of vision; i.e.*, of life after a vision of God. This name was given by universal consent, for it was the memorial of God's special kindness. After every manifestation of God, wonder resolves itself into praise. Where He appears, a well springs up in the wilderness to refresh our souls, and to impart the impulse of perpetual joy and thanksgiving.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 13, 14. Hagar gratefully acknowledges the interposition of God as a very present help in trouble. It was the Lord, Jehovah, that came to her rescue. It was no created angel, but the very Messenger of the Covenant Himself, the Lord, the Eternal God. As such, Hagar hails this heavenly visitor: "Thou regardest the low estate of thy handmaiden." And she seems to dwell on the seasonable and unlooked-for promptness of the help afforded: "Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me?" Was I looking out for Him? Or did His gracious Providence surprise me, and His gracious eye almost startle me, when He sought out one, alas! too far gone in hardness of heart ever to have thought of seeking Him? It is undoubtedly a memorable crisis in her history if it be rightly followed up and followed out. Truly may the well be called "the well of Him that liveth and seeth me"—of the living God who looketh on my affliction; and justly may the child be named "Ishmael," as the token that "the Lord will hear" the cry of the oppressed, and deliver the fainting soul. —(*Candlish.*)

Under the old Covenant such manifestations of God were only given to Moses, to Hagar, and to some others. But under the new Covenant, God was revealed in His Son. Men saw their invisible Maker and Judge. The special care of God for each individual man was seen in the gracious ministry of our Lord on earth.

A particular Providence. 1. *Difficult to believe.* We imagine God as working upon a large plan, but not as seeing and caring for individuals. It is not easy to bring ourselves to the belief that He is "about *our* path, and about *our* bed, and spieth out all *our* ways." We think of God in heaven, and forget that He is also on earth. What an effect it would have upon our lives if we really believed that God sees, and hears, and notes down everything we do! 2. *Sufficiently attested* *by examples in Holy Scripture.* Under the law we have many instances of God's special dealings with some men. The whole history of the Jewish people was an example of a particular Providence. All this is intended to show us God's care and concern for each man. In the Bible this doctrine is demonstrated in a few selected instances, so that we might learn the principles upon which God rules the whole world of mankind. 3. *Made clear and certain by the history of our Lord's work on earth.* Christ was the "image of the invisible God," making known to us what God is, and how He feels towards mankind. In this ministry on earth He showed us how each man is known and cared for; how the sorrows and wants of each touch the heart of infinite love. He spoke distinctly to men, and for the time (as it were) concentrated all His power and grace upon them. 4. *Realised in the history of every believer.* The Christian believes not only in God's great love towards all mankind, but can say with St. Paul, "Christ loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*." He knows that Divine love is not a vague feeling towards the mass of mankind, but a distinct affection for each. His own heart has answered to that love. The Shepherd of his soul has called him by name. He can no longer doubt that God knows and remembers him, and orders all his ways.

God beholds thee, individually, whoever thou art. He "calls thee by name." He knows what is in thee, all thy own peculiar feelings and thoughts, thy dispositions and likings, thy strength and thy weakness. He views thee in thy day of rejoicing, and thy day of sorrow. He sympathises in thy hopes and thy temptations. He interests Himself in all thy anxieties and remembrances, all the risings and fallings of thy spirit. He has numbered the very hairs of thy head and the cubits of thy stature. He compasses thee round and bears thee in His arms; He takes thee up and sets thee down. He notes thy very countenance, whether smiling or in tears, whether healthful or sickly. He looks tenderly upon thy hands and thy feet; He hears thy voice, the beating of thy heart, and thy very breathing. Thou art not only His creature; thou art man redeemed and sanctified, His adopted son, favoured with a portion of that glory and blessedness which flows from Him everlastingly unto the Only-begotten. Thou wast one of those for whom Christ offered up His last prayer and sealed it with His precious blood. What a thought is this, a thought almost too great for our faith!—(*J. H. Newman.*)

"Thou God seest me." Pause for a moment to contemplate the force of this impressive thought. Life is spent beneath the eye of God. In every part of His dominion, in all the worlds He has formed, His never-closing eye is present, His creative power is felt. The beams of His all-observant thought surround us. His omnipresence has been compared to a circle whose centre is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere. God, said the Greeks, is "All Eye." It is not the feeble and changing glance of fickle guilty man, but it is the pure and perfect scrutiny of the Eternal God, "in whose hand our breath is." His smile is life, His frown despair. Everything depends upon it. "Thou God seest me." Then it is not a vague and general observation, but a particular and minute notice—the sinner in his guilt equally with the Christian in his devotions—the peasant in his cottage equally with the prince on his throne. Not the actions only, but the principles, "me"—all that constitutes our essence, all that forms our character, the interior recesses of the spirit, the hidden motives of the heart, the secret springs of the character. This thought may be one—1. *Of grandeur.* With respect to God—His infinite dominion—His immense survey. With respect to man—his dignity—his responsibility—his destiny—he must, some day, come immediately before this Being. 2. *Of terror.* We are never safe. Sin cannot be even thought of without being known. Think of this when temptation invites. There is no darkness which can hide from God. 3. *Of consolation in sorrow.* He sees with a Father's eye which fills with compassion. He sees our sin and folly, and the sorrows of our repentance. He know all the trouble of our spirit and our desires to be purer and better. 4. *Of hope in danger.* He sees, not to increase our misery, but to help and save. When we are at our worst estate, when our grief is at its height, when the world fails us and casts us off—then is God's gracious opportunity and the time of His appearing to comfort us with His love. He sends His Covenant Angel to succour this desolate woman. None need despair, since God thus helps the outcast and the miserable.

The believer finds a well in the wilderness where Christ appears to strengthen and console. Memory afterwards returns to *that*, as the first bright-spot in the soul's history.

The vision of God is the beginning of spiritual life.

Nomus, one of the heathen gods, is said to have complained of Vulcan, that he had not set a grate at every man's breast. God hath a glazed window in the darkest houses of clay; He sees what is done in them, when none other can. To God's omnipotence there is nothing impossible; and to God's omniscience there is nothing invisible.—(*Secker.*)

The celebrated Linnaeus acknowledged the omniscience of God by placing over the door of the hall in which he gave his lectures, the inscription, *Innocui vivate! Numen adest.* Live guiltless! God is present.

"Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me?" On Hagar's part, this was the language of admiration, gratitude, devotion, love. Have I here in the desert, as contrasted with Abram's home where visions were to be looked for—for the visions of God were with him—here where I least expected them, and when I was out of the way of duty!

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 15, 16.

THE CONVICTION OF A SPECIAL PROVIDENCE: PRACTICAL EFFECTS.

I. That we enter again the paths of duty. The impression of this special visitation of God was not lost upon Hagar. She translated it into *duty*, and at the Divine command returned to the home which she had deserted. There, in the ways of humble duty, she was to serve God, and work out the designs of His Providence. The soul's true life is found not in prolonged rapture and amazement, but in simple faith, love, and obedience.

II. That we are found in the way of religious privilege. When Hagar wandered in the wilderness she put herself out of the way of the religious privileges which were found in Abram's family. She now returns to that home where God was feared with a holy dread, and confided in with a trusting love. If we have wandered from the place of religious privilege, and God has met us so that we can distinctly trace His dealings, it is our duty to return. The Church of God is our true home, where alone our graces can revive and grow.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 15, 16. It is here implied that Hagar told Abram of the vision, and of the name which God had appointed for her son. God's children take their part in carrying out His designs concerning others. Abram gives that name which had been revealed to another.

The trials of waiting for promised blessings. 1. The time is often long. Abram was now eighty-six years old, and up to this point of time was childless. He had to wait through many long and weary years till the sight of this child gladdened his eyes.

God sometimes delays the fulfilment of His promises so long that the patience of His people is sorely tried. 2. We may be deceived by what is only intended to be a provisional fulfilment. Abram thought that the son of Hagar was the promised and long-desired son by whom he was to be a blessing to all generations. But he had to wait fourteen years for the true son of promise. He rejoiced too soon. God often gives us some fulfilment of His word, which stays for a time the desires of our soul. Thus we are led on till we find, at last, that real and solid good which is laid up for us.

During thirteen years of the time of Abram's waiting, it would seem that all those delightful personal manifestations of the Almighty which he had hitherto enjoyed were suspended; but whether this was designed, as some have suggested, as a token of the Divine displeasure, or whether it is to be referred to the sovereign good pleasure of Him who giveth not account of any of His matters, it is not for us to say. It is certain, however, as a general fact, that similar conduct is productive of similar results, and that if we find that it is not with us as in times past—that communion with God is more than usually difficult—that our intercourse with heaven is sadly impeded, our prayers hindered, and our praises deadened—the cause is to be sought in ourselves. It is not a mere sovereign withdrawal of the light of God's countenance, but a merited rebuke of some secret offence, some unrestrained temper, some unholy compliance, some unchecked and unchastened desire, which is suffered to remain undetected in the heart, and to rob us of the promised blessing.—(*Bush.*)

The posterity of Ishmael were earliest in the field of history. In the ordinary view they seemed the greater and the more important; yet these were not to be the channels of God's highest blessings to mankind. Thus it is that "the first shall be last."

CHAPTER XVII.

Critical Notes.—1. The Lord.] *Heb. Jehovah*, the Author of existence and performance—the Covenant God. *Almighty God.* Heb. *El Shaddai.* El, the name for God, which signifies strong, eternal, absolute. *Shaddai.* From a verb signifying *to be strong—to destroy.* Hence the Irresistible One, able to make and to destroy—the Almighty. "This is the name which expresses God's Almightiness, and by which He says He was known to the patriarchs, rather than by the Covenant name Jehovah (Ex. vi. 3). This name is found six times in Genesis, and thirty-one times in the book of Job. This compound name in both parts expresses the Divine Majesty and All-Sufficiency, and impresses us with His sovereign ability to perform all He had promised." *(Jacobus.)* *Walk before Me.* Heb. expresses the idea emphatically, *Set thyself to walk.* *Perfect.* "Not sincere merely, unless in the primitive sense of duty; but complete, upright, holy—not only in walk, but in heart." *(Murphy.)* Holiness is the thing intended. **2. I will make My covenant.]** Not in the sense of now originating it, for which the Heb. expression is *to cut a covenant* (ch. xv. 18). The verb employed here means, *I will grant, fix, or establish* My covenant—carry into effect provisions already expressed. There was now to be a further development · the covenant was to be *sealed.* *Multiply thee.* The blessing of the "seed," more than the promise of "land" on the previous occasion. **3. God talked with him.]** "We must notice here the expression *Elohim*, and the *Dabbar* (word). God, as the Author of the universe, begins a conversation with Abram, when he should become Abraham the father of a multitude of nations." *(Lange.)* **4. As for Me.]** Thus one party to and the originator of the covenant is here made prominent. *Father of many nations.* Fulfilled in a literal sense. The twelve tribes of Israel, many Arab tribes, the twelve princes of Ishmael, Keturah's descendants, and the dukes of Edom sprang from him. But St. Paul teaches that this is also to be realised in a spiritual sense (Rom. iv. 16, 17). **5. Abram . . . . Abraham.]** The former name was composed of *Ab* (father) and *ram* (high, eminent). The name Abraham is formed by dropping the last letter, and inserting the first syllable of the word *hamon* (multitude). Abram-hamon is abbreviated into Abraham, *the high father of a multitude.* **Have I made thee.]** *Heb.* Have I given thee—appointed or constituted thee. The word used by St. Paul conveys exactly the same idea (τέθεικα) (Rom. iv. 17). **6. Kings.]** "From him were descended the chief of the twelve tribes of the Hebrews, and after their separation, the kings of Judah as well as the kings of Israel. From him sprang the ancient monarchs of Edom, and the Saracen kings in Arabia, Babylon, and Egypt. If we pass from the literal to the spiritual fulfilment, we find the heavenly Messiah, the King of kings, descending from the same stock, and all true Christians, his seed, by faith 'Kings and priests unto God'" (Rev. i. 6). (*Bush*). **8. The land wherein thou art a stranger.]** *Heb. The land of thy sojournings, or wanderings* **10. My Covenant.]** The outward sign is here called the Covenant, for it is the seal set upon the Covenant. The same mode of expression is used in Acts vii. 8. Also, in the Lord's Supper the Cup is called the New Testament in Jesus' blood. (Luke xxii. 19, 20). **Circumcised.** *Heb. Shall be cut round about, i.e.*, there shall be an excision of the prepuce or foreskin of the flesh of all the males. Herodotus speaks of this as a custom ancient in his time, and existing among several nations, chiefly the Egyptians and Ethiopians. **11. The flesh of your foreskin.]** The Heb. for *foreskin* signifies that which is "superfluous or redundant," not in itself, but in relation to the ordinance. The same word is applied figuratively to other parts, as to *the lips* (Ex. vi. 20); to *the ear* (Jer. vi. 10); to *the heart* (Lev. xxvi. 41; Isa. vi. 10). St. James plainly alludes to this (James i. 21) "superfluity of naughtiness." **12. Eight days old.]** *Heb. Son of eight days.* This rite was administered on the eighth day, even though it should happen to be a Sabbath. It was a Jewish maxim that "circumcision drives away the Sabbath." This maxim was acted upon in Our Lord's time. (John vii. 22, 23). Delayed till the eighth day, because all creatures newly born were reckoned unclean for seven days, and might not sooner be offered to God. (Lev. xii. 2, 3). No animal could be presented as an oblation before it was eight days old. (Lev. xxii. 27). **Born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed.]** "Here the rite is enjoined in case of household servants or slaves who were 'born in the house'—a class so often described (ver. 13). The last phrase qualifies the whole foregoing. The Heb. reads, 'And a son of eight days shall be circumcised to you. Every man child in your generations—the one born in the house—and the purchase of (silver) money—of every son of a stranger who is not of thy seed'—showing that those 'born in the house' refer to such as were not their own children, but 'of strangers'" *(Jacobus)*. **14. That soul.]** *Heb. That person.* **Cut off from his people.** "This phrase, first of all, means exclusion from the Covenant membership and treatment as a Gentile or alien. This was sometimes accompanied with the sentence of death" (Ex. xxxi. 14). *(Jacobus.)* "We believe the true sense of the phrase to be that the individual who transgresses the condition or sign of the Covenant thereby resigns his connection with the Hebrew community, and ceases to belong to it" *(Kalisch)*. Knobel, Murphy, and others, hold this view. **15. Thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.]** "It is acknowledged on all hands that *Sarah* means *a princess*; but as to Sarai, Hebraists are far from agreed. Gesenius and Ewald interpret it '*contentions*,' which seems unlikely in itself; Kalisch, *combating* or *contending*, which is not far off the other though differently understood, viz., 'as contending with difficulties;' and Delitzsch remarks well on this, that the *name of conflict*, Sarai, is changed into the *name of triumph*, Sarah. Others again (as Keil) suppose Sarai to signify princelike, and Sarah, princess; others, that Sarai means *my princess*, Sarah, princess absolutely" *(Alford)*. "As the ancestress of nations and kings, she should be called Sarah (princess), not Sarai (heroine)" *(Knobel)*. **16. She shall be a mother of nations.** *Heb. She shall become nations.* This was the first declaration that Sarah should be the mother of the promised seed. **17. Laughed.** Onk. *Rejoiced.* Jer. Tar. *Marvelled* (Psa. cxxvi. 1, 2; Job viii. 21). The laughter of admiration and joy. The promised son was by Divine direction called Isaac, which means "*laughter*" (ver. 19). **Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old?]** Thus his laughter was grounded on astonishment, as if this form of the blessing was most unlooked for. There may have been some hidden doubt suggested by the natural difficulties. Alford regards Abraham's feeling as one of mingled reverence and incredulousness. **18. O that Ishmael might live before thee.]** Not only in himself, but in his posterity. Abraham did not wish to relinquish the hopes which had already centred in his son, and still seems to look to him as the heir of the promise. The Heb. word for "live" has often the meaning of *prospering*. (Deut. viii. 1; 1 Sam. xxv. 6, 19). **Indeed.]** *Heb. But indeed.* "An emphatic term, as if to deny the contrary thought, couched, perhaps, in Abraham's plea for Ishmael. 'You need not doubt it. *Indeed*, on the contrary, Sarah is bearing thee a son.'" (*Jacobus*). **Isaac.]** *Heb. He shall laugh.* Thus laughter complicated with astonishment and perplexity would, for Abraham, be turned into true laughter. **I will establish My Covenant with him.]** This was to be the Covenant son—the true type of Christ—the channel of blessings to all nations. (Rom. ix. 7). **20. Twelve princes shall he beget.]** "As Jacob, the son of Isaac, was the father of twelve patriarchs or phularchs, *i.e.*, heads of tribes, so Isaac is here made the subject of a parallel prediction; and for its remarkable fulfilment consult the history" (Gen. xxv. 12—16). *(Bush.)* **21. This set time in the next year.]** This very time in the following year. (Compare Gen. xxi. 2.) **22. God went up from Abraham.]** *Chal.* "The glory of the Lord went up." The visible majesty of Jehovah, the Shekinah, the symbol of the Divine presence (Gen. xxxv. 13; Ezek. i. 29, viii. 4). But God was personally present, though revealed in some visible form (ver. 1). **25. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised.]** From this circumstance has followed the usage of the Arabians, who circumcise their males in the thirteenth year.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1, 2.

PREPARATION FOR FRESH SPIRITUAL PRIVILEGES.

The course of Abraham's life is truly "the path of the just, shining more and more unto the perfect day." God is about to show him greater things—to open the full blessings of His Covenant. In the believer's history, the richest and best things are kept till the last. Before God bestows them He prepares the mind and heart for their reception, and chiefly (as in this instance) in two ways:

I. **Divine visitation.** "The Lord appeared to Abram." He made the patriarch sensible of His presence, and revealed His awful majesty as far as it could be endured by mortal sight. This was a specially favoured saint, for he had an exalted perception of God, permitted only to a few; and yet in the case of every believer there are times when God evidently appears. There is such a feeling of the Divine presence before we are about to receive distinguished favours. Thus we are prepared by awe and reverence for fresh gifts of goodness and mercy. But, as it was with Abraham, there is often something in our past history, some prolonged trouble or perplexity, so that we stand in special need of the comfort of a Divine visitation. 1. *To reward long trial and patience.* Abram had waited for thirteen years in much perplexity as to what the Providence of God really meant for him. The promise had once seemed near, but the trials of time had brought strange misgivings. The tried saint was still looking towards some undefined blessing in the future. His heart was growing sick with hope deferred. Then God visits him to put a period to the sore trial of his patience. God visits those who wait for Him. 2. *To reveal the Divine purpose more clearly.* The dealings of God with Abram were growing more and more strange. He had no open vision. Nothing was perfectly clear. Now God visits him to reveal His purpose more distinctly. The promised blessings are made more definite. New light is thrown upon the future so that it affects the soul like a real and palpable good. Every time God appears it is to give more light. God's revelation has grown clearer in the successive dispensations of His grace towards mankind.

II. **Enlargement and exaltation of the idea of duty.** The more we know of God, the more exalted and noble our conception of the duty we owe to Him. Our sense of the holiness of His law increases. 1. *We have a clearer idea of the standard of duty.* "Walk before me." The moral character of God is proposed for our imitation. Human actions are viewed in Scripture, not merely as they affect the well-being of society, but in their relation to the requirements of God's will. The standard of duty is conformity to the Divine nature. Piety is the constant study and endeavour to please God. 2. *We see what is the true evidence of duty.* "Be thou perfect." Perfect obedience—completeness of spiritual character—respect unto all God's commandments—these are the evidences that our duty has been rendered acceptably. The constant *aim* after perfection is a proof that our piety is real and sincere. 3. *We have the Divine encouragements of duty.* "I am the Almighty God." As we have infinite goodness to furnish us with an idea and an example, so we have infinite power to support us and to give us the necessary strength. He who commands can furnish us with energy for our duty, and is able to reward us afterwards. Hence "all things are possible to him that believeth."

WALKING BEFORE GOD.

I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect. These words were spoken to Abraham after his leaving his country in obedience to the Divine command (ch. xii.); his giving up his own interest for peace with Lot (ch. xiii.);

his venturing his life to rescue his kinsman (ch. xiv.); his being met and blessed by Melchizedek, and refreshed and strengthened with bread and wine; his believing the Divine promise, and being justified (ch. xv.). They imply—

I. **A declaration.** "I am the Almighty God." Whose favour is better than life—yea, is the greatest good; and whose displeasure is worse than death—yea, is the greatest evil. Who is perfectly able to direct thee in all difficulties, to protect thee in all dangers, to comfort thee in all troubles, and to supply all thy wants. Able to strengthen thee for thy spiritual warfare, for thy duty, and for suffering. Able to work *in* thee and *by* thee His whole will, and to raise thee to a state of felicity and glory inconceivable and eternal. Or, *All-Sufficient*, whose favour, and image, and communion with whom are an all-sufficient portion, here and hereafter.

II. **A command.** "Walk before me." To walk before God is, to remember that we are *before Him*, at all times, in all places, employments, companies; and to think of His omnipresence,—that His eye is upon us, and upon all our ways, our thoughts, desires, tempers, words and works, motives and ends,—that He is not an unconcerned spectator of our deportment; but is so holy as constantly to approve or disapprove, and to abhor or delight in our spirit or conduct,—that He is so just as to determine to punish or reward,—that He is so merciful as to forgive, through Christ, all that is past, and so gracious as to be even ready to change our nature at the present, and enable us to live to His glory for the future. It is to have these things in daily recollection; to think, speak, act, etc., under a sense of them; to have an eye to Him in all our walk, as God *Almighty* and *All-sufficient*. Is this favour better than life? Then let us value it, and have an eye to it accordingly. Is He able to direct in difficulties, protect in dangers, comfort in troubles, and supply our wants? Then let us look to Him for direction, protection, comfort, and supply of our wants. Is He able to strengthen us for our spiritual warfare and sufferings? Then let us look to Him to do this for us. Is His favour and image, and communion with Him, an all-sufficient portion here and hereafter? Then let us view Him as our chief good, and live constantly, in all our conduct, under a sense of this.

III. **A further command, or promise.** "Be thou perfect," or, ***Thou shalt be perfect***. As a COMMAND it imports, Thou shalt be *upright* and *sincere* in all the particulars above mentioned. As a PROMISE, Thou shalt be *perfect* as thy state and nature can bear. *Negatively*, not in *knowledge*, so far as to be free from ignorance, error, mistake; or in *holiness*, so as to have no infirmity, failing, or defect; or in *happiness*, so as to have no adversity, pain, reproach, affliction, etc., or so as not to feel such things as evils. But *positively* perfect in a *knowledge* of the greatest and most important truths of the Gospel, as far as they are revealed (Heb. vi. 1; Eph. iv. 14). In *holiness*, so as both to have power over sin, and deliverance from all those tempers, words, and works that are known to be evil; and also to have faith, hope, love, humility, and all other graces in lively and vigorous exercise. In *happiness*, so as to receive all trials, etc., in faith, hope, patience, and resignation, and to find *God* a sufficient portion.

The readiest way to this perfection is to walk before God as above described. We shall then see light in His light, and gain a knowledge which shall "shine clearer to the perfect day." While steadily contemplating the holiness of God, as revealed by His spirit, we shall not only adore, but abase ourselves before Him (Job xlii. 6), and see our need of conformity to Him. Also, while regarding His mercy and faithfulness, we shall obtain encouragement to trust in Him, and by faith in His promises we are actually made partakers of His holiness. In short, while we walk before Him as the all-sufficient God we shall be blessed with the fulness of His grace and goodness. It is promised in this way. Only let us *walk* before God, and He will make us perfect.—*(Rev. J. Benson's Sermons and Plans.)*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. The several stages in the Patriarch's history are carefully noted. The trials and anxieties of His servant were all known to the Covenant God.

Anxious haste on the part of believers is often accompanied by tarrying on the part of God.

The Almighty shows no haste in His dealings with His people. What seems to us to be delay, is truly no delay with Him. (II. Peter ii. 9.)

The longest night of the believer's trial has an end. God appears, at last, to console His servants and to reward their faith and patience of hope.

Before the command of holy duty, God speaks His name of *power*. But for the assurance of Divine grace to help, the thought of our duty would only fill us with dismay. Human systems of morality lay down the lines of conduct, but suggest no sufficient power to enable us to render obedience. Hence their failure to regenerate mankind. But *revealed religion* tells us of an Almighty God who supports and assures us by His power, so that we can bear our trials and do His will.

"Fear not! I will help thee." Fear not! If there were an ant at the door of thy granary, asking for help, it would not ruin thee to give him a grain of thy wheat; and thou art nothing but a tiny insect at the door of My all-sufficiency. I will help thee.—(*Spurgeon.*)

Thus did God appear to Abram, by the name of God Almighty—the name most appropriate when He claims the confidence of His people, in giving exceeding great and precious promises, as the name Jehovah is the more significant when He is about to fulfil them. (Ex. vi. 3.) In promising, He appeals to His omnipotence; in fulfilling, to His unchangeableness. As God Almighty, able to do whatsoever He says, He calls to a perfect walk before Him. As Jehovah, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, He gives warrant for a patient waiting upon Him, till all be accomplished. In the one character, God summons you to begin, or to begin anew, your course. In the other, He encourages you to hold on to the end.—(*Candlish.*)

The Almightiness of God—1. Rebukes our lack of unwavering faith. The announcement of this sacred name may have partly been intended as a rebuke to Abram for his impatience. 2. Teaches us to leave with God all that concerns us. They are in safe keeping, and God can best choose His modes of help, and ways and times of deliverance. 3. Teaches us to practise perfect openness with God. We should disguise nothing from Him—lay open our troubles before Him, for He has power to help; and our sins, for He has power to save. 4. Is the remedy against all discouragement. God supports us by His own power, and fulfils all His promises. The righteous possess a Divine strength which increases amidst the decays of nature (Isa. xl. 29–31).

To walk before God is—1. To live as in His sight, and under His special inspection. 2. To realise, at all times, His presence and His Providence. 3. To feel the dignity of the godly life. We are not to walk *behind* him, as if ashamed, but *before* Him, as conscious of the dignity of our high calling. 4. To feel the constant energy of spiritual life. The light of God's countenance is upon us, and in *that* we have life. We cannot fail with the Almighty power behind us. 5. To feel the love of God towards us. Unless there was redeeming love on God's part, it would be impossible for us to walk before Him. In *that* alone our souls can live and move. 6. To apprehend God's love by our faith. This is that power in the soul that lays hold of the Divine fulness. Hence "the just shall live by his faith."

Walk constantly, step by step, and keep pace with me. Austin would not, for the gain of a million of worlds, be an atheist for half an hour, because he knew not but God might in that time make an end of him. For, "Can two walk together and they not agreed?"

saith the prophet (Amos iii. 3). "Ye cannot serve the Lord," saith Joshua to the people that promised fair (Josh. xxiv. 19), that is, unless ye will serve Him entirely, walk uprightly, as Abram here; walk evenly, without halting or halving with Him. Holiness must run through the whole life, as the warp doth through the woof; all the parts of our line of life must be straight before God. "As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity"—with openly profane persons, when "peace shall be upon Israel" (Psa. cxxv. 5), upon all that are "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile" (John i. 27; Psa. xxxii. 2). Surely, as an unequal pulse shows a distempered body, so doth uneven walking an unsound soul—such as is not verily persuaded that God is all-sufficient, able, and ready to reward the upright, and punish the hypocrite. *(Trapp.)*

In the command to walk before God, faith and works are brought together. We have the *principle* of life—the motive power; and also the *results* of life. The power of faith, like all other forces, is only known by its *effects.*

Before my face. The anthropomorphisms of the Scripture. The soul, head, eyes, arm of God, are mentioned in the Bible. The Concordances give all the information anyone needs. It is not difficult to ascertain the meaning of the particular descriptions. His face is His presence in the definiteness and certainty of the personal consciousness (Psa. cxxxix.).—*(Lange.)*

Perfect, upright, sincere. Not only must the *walk,* in its outward aspects, be according to godliness; but the *principle* by which we are guided must be pure and genuine. The heart is the spring of action.

We can never attain a vigorous spiritual life unless we have the *highest* aim. Our *mark* should be the moral nature of God. The Infinite alone can draw out all our powers.

Abram is called to be perfect. This word "perfect," or "upright," when applied to man, in the Bible, is not absolute, but relative. It relates, for the most part, not to the whole character of a man, but to some one particular feature of his character, some individual grace or virtue specified, in respect of which he is said to be complete or entire, consistent, and sincere. Instances of this use of the word are frequent in the Psalms. Thus, in the concluding words of the thirty-second Psalm, the righteousness or uprightness mentioned has reference to the single duty of confessing sin to God (ver. 1-5), and denotes freedom from guile, or the unreserved openness of a heart unburdening itself, in the full and frank confidence of faith, to God. In Psa. lxiv., the particular respect in which perfection is ascribed to the man of God (ver. 5), is his inoffensive demeanour towards his enemies. So, again, in Psa. cxxxix., the Psalmist challenges to himself perfection, as a hater of those who hate God (ver. 22)—a hater of their principles, their society, their works and ways—hating them as God hates them, not personally, but for their wickedness' sake; and hating them in that sense, perfectly, with no secret reserve in favour of what may be agreeable or amiable in their sins—no complacency in their company, nor any love of their conversation. In Psa. ci., by undertaking to walk in a perfect way, and with a perfect heart, the Psalmist simply avows his determination to discourage vice and countenance holiness in the ordering of his household and the ruling of his court and kingdom. And in the preparation for the building of the Temple (1 Chron. xxix. 9), David and the people are said to offer gifts to the Lord "with a perfect heart," *i.e.,* with a heart perfect, in regard to this act of liberality, as an act springing from no unworthy or dishonest—no selfish or self-righteous or superstitious motives, but done with a single eye to the glory of God, the worship of His house, and the honour of His name.—*(Candlish.)*

It is said in classic history, that a statuary, who resolved to cut out of the Parian marble a female figure the most beautiful and graceful the world ever saw, or the poet ever dreamed of, induced all the beauties of Greece to come to him in succession, while he selected from each the feature that was in the highest perfection, and transferred it to the marble on which he was working; and when this beautiful thing was finished, it became the admiration of Greece, and of the utmost bound of Europe. In order to form a perfect character, we need copy none but Christ.—*(F. F. Trench.)*

"Oh, how the thought of God attracts
And draws the heart from earth,
And sickens it of passing shows
And dissipating mirth!
God only is the creature's home;
Though long and rough the road,
Yet nothing less can satisfy
The love that longs for God.

Dole not thy duties out to God,
But let thy hand be free:
Look long at Jesus: His sweet blood—
How was it dealt to thee?
The perfect way is hard to flesh:
It is not hard to love.
If thou wert sick for want of God,
How swiftly wouldst thou move!

Oh! keep thy conscience sensitive;
No inward token miss;
And go where grace entices thee:
Perfection lies in this.
Be docile to thine unseen Guide;
Love Him as He loves thee:
Faith and obedience are enough,
And thou a saint shalt be."—*Faber.*

Verse 2. *My Covenant*, which I have already purposed and formally closed. *I will grant*, carry into effect the provisions of it. *Multiply thee.* The seed is here identified with the head or parent seat of life. The seed now comes forward as the prominent benefit of the covenant.—*(Murphy).*

The covenant blessing of the *seed*, is a higher and greater one than that of *land*, which was promised on former occasions. In the progress of revelation, God's gracious designs towards mankind assume, at each successive step, a nobler form. God is ever giving us greater things, and that which is natural leads to that which is spiritual.

It has pleased God mostly to use human agency in bringing about His purposes. Hence the connection between the development of the race and the history of religion. The whole of mankind are to be helped through Christ, indeed, as the central power; but also through good men, as those in whom that power lives, and acts, and by whom it is distributed.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 3-8.

THE SECOND STAGE OF THE COVENANT.

Already Jehovah, the Covenant God, had appeared thrice to Abram. (1) Simply to assure him that he should be blessed, and become a blessing (ch. xii. 7). (2) To give him the promise of a numerous progeny, as the dust of the earth for multitude (ch. xiii. 16). (3) To repeat this assurance, but now likening the number of his seed to the stars of heaven (ch. xv. 5). This third vision was confirmed by a solemn sacrifice. In it God stands clearly out as the contracting party, conveying certain blessings to Abram, and requiring the performance of no distinct conditions on his part. Now the Covenant has moved forwards another stage, and Abram is to take his own part in it by receiving the appointed sign—"the sign and seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised." (Rom. iv. 11.) This second stage of the Covenant was marked—

I. By more definite and circumstantial promises. In the revelation of God's will to mankind we can trace a gradual progress. Promises and prophecies, at first vague and mysterious, are succeeded by others which are clearer and more minute in their contents. As time moves on, the Divine purpose becomes more definitely revealed. Such were the prophecies concerning

Christ, until the fulness of time was come. This law of progressive revelation has an illustration in the case of Abram. The original promise is renewed, but spread more out into details. Consider these promised blessings—1. *In their natural greatness.* Though they have a higher meaning and importance, yet there are aspects of them which belong entirely to this present world. They speak of a numerous seed, of Abram as the fountain of the inextinguishable life of countless generations. They speak of him as the progenitor of kings and great nations, so that there was spread before him the vision of great lawgivers, and statesmen, and warriors, and all that belongs to the idea of a great civilisation. His seed would be great and distinguished, cared for in an especial manner by God, living under the immediate eye of Providence, and made to fill a prominent place in the history of mankind. Their continuance was assured by an unfailing covenant, by which God bound Himself to preserve them. They are the only nation of mankind whose history is written on the awful scroll of prophecy. Hence they still persist throughout human history—a remarkable evidence of the truth and stability of God's word. 2. *In their spiritual significance.* Considering that it was God who made these promises, and in behalf of men who were destined to live for ever, they cannot be restricted to this present life, but look towards a higher and a spiritual world. Their ultimate reference is above and beyond the things of time and sense. The numerous seed represents a wider family, the children of Abram's faith who are to be blessed with him. The sands on the sea-shore, and the multitude of the stars, speak to us Christians of the number and extent of the true Church of God. That, too, is possessed of an indestructible life—an energy which will remain unhurt by the wrongs of time. The spiritual privileges of the Church are secured by covenant. The true King of men—the rightful Monarch of human souls, has sprung from Abram, and He has gathered around Him a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people. There is only one institution now in the world whose continued existence is assured, and that is the family of God named after the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. iii. 14, 15). Thus the life of Abram, speading and continuing through history, is a figure of the life of the Church of God. Also, the promise of the *land* to Abram for an everlasting possession points to a more glorious inheritance--the heavenly Canaan. In some way or other, Abram was to inherit the land; for so the grant runs, "I will give unto thee, and unto thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession" (ver. 8). Thus Abram himself had a vested right in this inheritance—a condition which was never fulfilled in this world, and which can only be satisfied by an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. God leads His people from the earthly to the heavenly, and through many disappointments He conducts them to some real and permanent good. The blessing in its highest form may for a while be hidden from them, but in the end it is revealed, and their souls are satisfied. Again: this second stage of the Covenant was marked—

II. **By a changed name.** Abram had reached a new stage in his history, and this is indicated by a *new name.* So the name Jacob was changed to that of "Israel," which signifies *Prevailer,* in remembrance of his triumphant wrestling with the Angel of the Covenant, and as a gracious assurance of his future successes in prayer. The name Cephas was changed to that of *Peter,* to indicate that a stage of firm and unshaken faith had been reached. The sons of Zebedee were called *Boanerges,* to signify their new-born zeal and the earnest work which they were to do. With God, names are not empty designations, but represent the truth of things. They are the outward signs of reality. They are a form which encloses a substance. God gives a new name with a new nature. To Abraham it was as a *new life* to find the promises growing more clear, the gifts of God's goodness more palpable and evident. His importance in the external history of nations, his spiritual connection with the Church in all ages, the deathless energy of the example of his life, all combined to make this time, as it were, a resurrection into a new state. All things had become new. Abraham's faith had prevailed, and a new name was given to him as it shall be given to all who have overcome. This second stage in the Covenant was also marked,

III. By special engagements on the part of God. A covenant implies two parties, and among men takes the form of a bargain, or agreement, with conditions imposed. But with God it becomes a covenant of grace, which is virtually a command, founded upon God's promises, and the advances of His love. "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee" (ver. 4). God is the fountain of the blessing, and the sole proposer of the terms. His covenant is the only foundation of all our hope. We can look for nothing but what is thus assured to us. God first engages Himself to us, and then we become bound to engage ourselves to Him. To believers in covenant, God conveys the riches which are in Christ. They are bound to a life of faith and love, and He engages Himself to impart His fulness. 1. *This should excite our gratitude.* As creatures, and especially as sinful creatures, we are not in a position to dictate to God or to lay any claims on His bounty. We, therefore, receive all as the gift of His grace, and the uppermost feeling in our hearts should be gratitude. When the Most High binds Himself down for our sakes, we can only adore His goodness with a thankful heart. 2. *It should stimulate our faith.* Every fresh blessing received is a confirmation of our past faith and an additional reason why we should trust for the future. Thus a long-tried faith, and a faith encouraged by fulfilled hopes, becomes to us as the certainties of *knowledge.* "*I know* whom I have believed." As God's engagements to bless come home more and more to our life and experience, a new impulse should be given to our faith in Him for all that is to come. 3. *It should excite our reverence.* When Jehovah appeared to announce His Covenant blessings, Abram "fell on his face" (ver. 3). He was oppressed with the sense of God's Sovereign Majesty. The sublime Object of our worship appears in the greatness and freeness of His blessings. Such good and perfect gifts can only come from the Father of Lights. Profound reverence should be the posture of our souls when God appears, for reverence is the life of all religion and that habit of soul which prepares it for that heavenly state where one Supreme Will alone is loved and obeyed. The worship of reverence and praise is eternal. To be brought to the feet of God in humble adoration, and in the bliss of His presence, is our highest glory.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 3. Like Abraham, we must learn to fall upon our faces before God as a preparation for receiving His promised blessings.

The first effect of a Divine manifestation is to overcome us, and thus an awe and silence are produced by which we are fitted to hear what God will say.

There is no playing in phrases or disputing about God when once He appears. All speculation and controversy are hushed, and we feel the greatness of His power and majesty.

This is the lowliest form of reverence, in which the worshipper leans on his knees and elbows, and his forehead approaches the ground. Prostration is still customary in the East. Abram has attained to loftier notions of God. *God talked with him.* Jehovah, El Shaddai, is here called God. The Supreme appears as the Author of existence, the Irresistible and Everlasting, in this stage of the Covenant relation.—(*Murphy.*)

God's revelation of Himself is made to reverent minds.

It was fit that he should fall on his

face, now that God talked with him. Such a posture of body befits us at the hearing of the word, as may best express our reverence, and further our attention. Balak is bid to rise up to hear Balaam's parable. (Num. xxiii. 18.) Eglon, though a fat unwieldy man, riseth up from his seat to hear God's message from Ehud. (Judges iii. 20.) The people in Nehemiah "stood up" (ch. viii. 5) to hear the law read and expounded. Constantine the Great would not be entreated to sit down or be covered at a sermon; no more would our Edward VI., whose custom was also to take notes of what he heard. The Thessalonians are commended for this, that they heard Paul's preaching "as the word of God, and not of man." (1 Thess. ii. 13.) Had Samuel thought it had been God that called to him (and not Eli), he would not have slept, but fallen on his face before the Lord, as Abram here, who was no novice, but knew well that though God loves to be acquainted with men in the walks of their obedience, yet He takes state upon Him in His ordinances, and will be trembled at in His word and judgments.—*(Trapp.)*

The speech of God to man makes up the substance of the Bible. We can know the nature of physical bodies by knowing their properties and relations, but we can only know the nature of a person when he speaks. He thus declares himself. Hence the necessity for revelation if we are to know anything of God.

Where did holy men of old get those sublime ideas of God and human duty and destiny—ideas which never could have arisen in the mind uninformed from a Divine source? The only answer is, that *God talked with them.*

Verse 4. The greatness of the Being from whom the Covenant proceeded imparted to it a surpassing value, grandeur, and excellence.

The assurance of God's Covenant mercies console us after long trials, and revive our faith and devotion.

God might have formed gracious designs towards us, and yet have us ignorant of them. But He has revealed to us His gracious purpose in Christ Jesus. He hastens to console us, as He did to Abram, by telling us that His Covenant is with us and for our advantage. Our hope's foundation lies in the word of God.

The living personality of the Divine Being lights up the pages of the Bible, and imparts the potency of life to its truths.

The living energy of the faith of this primitive and model believer pervades all history. Abraham, according to St. Paul, is "heir of the world." All nations which have any future before them profess that same faith (though with added light) which was held by this first Father of the Church. To Abraham and his seed we Christians are indebted for all the religious privileges we enjoy.

Thus emphatically is the promise confirmed to Abraham; and the assurance is peculiarly well timed, and well fitted to sustain and revive his spiritual faith. What does he see before him? Not a long line of earthly monarchs and a great variety of earthly communities, all tracing their natural descent from him as their common ancestor, but a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations and kindreds and peoples, and tongues, gathered into one in Christ; all justified like Himself, by faith, and all rejoicing to be called His children, and to be blessed as such along with Him. The patriarch had indeed many sons after the flesh, for his second spouse bore him a numerous offspring, and of these sons many various nations sprung, over whom renowned kings reigned. But it was not such a patriarchal honour that Abraham chiefly valued. Himself a partaker of the righteousness that is by faith, he longed for a more illustrious distinction, and sought a more congenial family to arise and call him father. He saw the day of Christ afar off, and in Christ he saw the exceeding increase and fruitfulness of the great household of faith, the countless host of the elect, gathered into one out of all nations, united in the same holy faith and fellowship with himself; and finally, nations themselves and their kings converted to the knowledge of the Saviour in whom he believed, and so becoming His children indeed. What a prospect, to revive, to elevate, and to ennoble the patriarch; to break every worldly and carnal spell; to make the eye of his spiritual faith beam keen, and the pulse of his spiritual life beat warm, and high, and strong!—(*Candlish*).

This Covenant was not made with many nations, but with one man. They were to trace their natural and spiritual greatness to him: Thus it was intended that the world should grow familiar with the great principle upon which our salvation rests—redemption through One, even Christ. Not by laws of progress, or political systems, or philosophies, are mankind to be delivered, but by the Son of God, who has brought salvation.

Verse 5. It has been said that all our science consists ultimately in giving right names to things. God, who knows all, can give names which correspond to realities.

"God calleth those things which be not as though they were," *i.e.*, He called or denominated Abraham *the father of a multitude*, because he should finally become so, though now he had but one child, and he not the child of promise.—(*Bush.*)

A new name—1. Is fitted for those who have new hopes and a clearer view of their inheritance. Abraham had now his hope turned in a new and unlooked-for direction. His inheritance in the future was more clearly marked out; the whole scene standing vividly before him, so as to affect his soul with the sense of new pleasures. 2. Is a stimulus to fulfil the high destiny signified by the changed name. That name would ever remind the patriarch of God's calling and purpose.

By the exposition given of this promise in the New Testament (Rom. iv. 16, 17), we are directed to understand it not only of those who sprang from Abraham's body, though these were many nations; but also of all that should be of "the faith of Abraham." It went to make him the Father of the Church of God in all future ages; or, as the Apostle calls him, "the heir of the world." In this view he is the father of many, even of "a multitude of nations." All that the Christian world enjoys, or ever will enjoy, it is indebted for it to Abraham and his seed. A high honour this, to be the Father of the Faithful, the stock from which the Messiah should spring, and on which the Church of God should grow. It was this honour that Esau despised, when he sold his birthright; and here lay the *profaneness* of that act, which involved a contempt of the most sacred of all objects—the Messiah, and His everlasting kingdom!—(*Fuller.*)

God has no relations to time (as we count it) and speaks of the future as here, and present before Him. We may well, therefore, trust His word against all appearances to the contrary.

The *high father* becomes the *father of a multitude*; thus God enlarges the portion of those who trust in Him.

Verse 6. God's Providence ordains the sources of nations, and controls their destinies.

Nations and kings. Thus the history of mankind is to stand connected with political order.

The true king of men was to arise from the seed of Abraham. All kings shall fall down before Him.

God, in His Providence, ordered nations to arise with kings over them with their laws and usages of government, in order that He might prepare mankind for the idea of a holy nation, presided over by the true priest-king.

The spiritual is founded on the natural, and is the goal of it. Abraham's high distinction is that he is the spiritual father of a vast spiritual progeny, having a Divinely established order, and under one Supreme sovereignty.

Nations, though they may exist for ages, at length share the mortality of their founders. Kings reign for a few brief years, and then pass away. But the nation of true believers and their kingship are perpetual, for they belong to that realm of the Messiah which for ever lasts.

There was this sense existing in men's hearts, showing itself in their acts, that the relations between man and man rest on something out of sight, that they are spiritual relations, not those of force, or fraud, or convenience—that men do not huddle together as cattle to keep themselves warm, nor band together as wild beasts, that they may hunt in company; that law is not the result of so much self-will which each man might have kept, yet for certain advantageous considerations throws into a common stock, but that rather there is a law of laws, anterior to and constituting the ground of each positive enactment. If men had any sense of this divine order, which they did not themselves constitute, but into which they entered—which to accept was good, which to deny and fight against was evil—if they did thus believe, in the words of the father of Roman philosophy, *nos ad justitiam esse natos*, then we have implicitly here an acknowledgment of, and a yearning after, the kingdom of God. They who believed this, believed in "the City which hath foundations," in that only one which can have everlasting foundations, for it is the only one whose foundations are laid in perfect righteousness and perfect truth—the city "whose builder and maker is God"—the same that Abraham looked for, and because he looked for would take no portion in the cities of confusion round him, but dwelling in tents witnessed against them, and declared plainly that he sought a country—the city of which *we* already are made free, and which it was given to the latest seer of the New Covenant, ere the Book was sealed, to behold in the spirit coming down in its final glory from Heaven (Rev. xxi. 2.)—(*Trench*).

Verse 7. The Abrahamic Covenant includes the seed of the parent along with himself. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made." The great chief personage contemplated in *the seed* is *Jesus* (Gal. iii. 16). But the seed does also include all who are in Christ (Gal. iii. 9). This household feature of the Covenant is perpetual. It was from the beginning the plan of God to propagate His Church by means of a pious posterity; and in His Covenant provision, He is pleased to compass in His arms of love not only the parent, but the infant children also. This was definitely fixed by the very terms of the Covenant, and in the very form of the Covenant seal. And it has thus always been a feature of the Church. And it comes down to us under the New Testament dispensation: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. For the promise is unto you, and to your children" (Gal. iii. 29; Acts ii. 39). The seed of Abram according to the flesh—the Jewish people—has great promises as a people (Rom. iv.).—*(Jacobus.)*

The great blessings of God's Covenant were not intended to terminate in those who first received them, but to flow down though the generations of mankind. God gives as one who inherits all time.

Children may be partakers of God's Covenant, though they are unconscious of its nature and blessings.

There were blessings of the Covenant which were intended to be partial and to endure only for a time, but in their higher meaning and intent they are eternal. God hath willed it that His greatest gifts to those who love Him shall be enjoyed for ever (Heb. xiii. 20).

God's gifts are kingly. 1. In their greatness. For He is Lord and possessor of all. He gives not according to our narrow, niggardly notions, but *according* to His fulness. 2. In their duration. He is King for ever, and therefore can bestow eternal good.

God is in covenant with every child of grace. Let witnesses be called. First, let Abraham appear. He was born in sin,—prone to evil,—the child of wrath, laden with iniquity, just as we are. But his evidence asserts that God thus communed with him, "I will establish My Covenant between thee, and thy seed after thee." Let David next be heard. By natural descent he was as we are. But his truthful gratitude exclaims, "He hath made with me an everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things, and sure." Thus far the point is clear. God covenants with man. But perhaps some trembling believer may doubt whether such grace extends beyond the favoured elders in the household of faith. Mercy speeds to give the reply. The Covenant is established with Abraham, and his seed after him (Gal. iii. 29). If you are Christ's, you are a Covenant-child of God. In His majesty, God says, "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thy hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a Covenant to the people." We are here bade to gaze on Jesus, as Himself the Covenant. And such He is: for it has no being, no continuance, no power but in Him. He is its essence, its reality, its fulness, its all. It is founded, erected, concluded in Him. No Christ, no Covenant. Receive Him, and it is yours in all its truth and riches. Reject Him, and you perish, because you have not the shadow of a plea. He is the Covenant, because, as Jehovah's fellow, He designs it, and wills it, and orders it, and frames it, and accepts it. He is the Covenant, because, as God-man, He takes it into His own hand, and works out its every condition.—*(Archdeacon Law: "Christ in All.")*

The Covenant with Abraham's Children by faith. 1. Christ is the messenger of it (Mal. iii. 1). He tells us that it is made, and informs us of its contents; by His word—His servants—His sealing ordinances. 2. Christ is the Surety of it (Heb. vii. 22). He engages to carry out its provisions, and by His Spirit to work in His people the fruits of righteousness. 3. Christ is the Mediator of it (Heb. xii. 24). He touches God and man, and they become one in Him. He is the Mediator by means of death (Heb. ix. 15). Thus it was sealed with His blood.

To be a God unto thee. Thus all God's promises to His people, which seem to point to merely limited and temporal good, have their fruition in glory; we have only that one name for that happiness which is dealt out according to the full measures of the Divine riches.

What God *is* and what he *has* belongs to the whole generation of faithful believers.

All the privileges of the Covenant of mercy, its richest joys and most glorious hopes, are summed up in this assurance. He that comes within its scope, as does every believer, can desire nothing more to make him happy. It is as if He had said, "Whatever I am or have, or purpose in a way of grace to do, all that I will be to thee and to thy seed, all that shall be employed for thy protection, consolation, and salvation."—*(Bush.)*

The force of language can no further go to express the bliss of God's chosen; for what good can there be which is not in God? Therefore, blessed are they whose God is Jehovah (Psa. cxliv. 15).

Verse 8. The temporal and the spiritual are here brought together. The land of promise is made sure to the heir of promise *for a perpetual possession*, and God engages to *be their God*. The phrase "perpetual possession" has here two elements of meaning: first, that the possession in its coming form of a certain land shall last as long as the co-existing relations of things are continued; and, secondly, that the said possession, in all the variety of its ever grander phases, will last absolutely for ever. Each form will be perfectly adequate to each stage of a progressive humanity. But in all its forms, and at every stage, it will be their chief glory that God is their God.—*(Murphy.)*

They who possess God can never want any good thing. The blessings which are suited to them in this life last as long as they require them, while those which are specially suited to the habits and requirements of their spiritual nature last for ever.

God's promises are fulfilled to believers in their lower sense, so that they might be prepared for their enjoyment in a higher. The land of Canaan was thus a type of heaven, that blessed country which shall be cleared of all enemies, and shall be the portion of God's people for ever. They were once "strangers" to it, for it was not theirs by the inheritance of birth, but it has been given to them as the inheritance of faith—as the grant of grace, and not as coming of natural right.

The two expressions, "I will be a God unto thee," and "I will be their God," represent religion considered in two ways. 1. As personal. The soul comes face to face with the personal God. And God gives Himself entirely to the individual believer as if there were no other being besides that soul which He loves. He is not imperfect, as we are who can only bestow but a little of our thought and feeling upon others; for it is a necessity of His nature that He should love with all the directness and intensity of His being. 2. As the character of a corporate body. While we rejoice in the intimate and full relation in which God stands to our individual souls, we must not be unmindful of the spiritual interests of others—of the Church of God considered as a corporate body. God's word teaches believers to give due regard both to *public* and to *private* interests. The infinite resources of God secure the perpetual bliss of the heavenly Canaan.

Abraham most certainly saw in this promise the hope of an inheritance with God, to be reached by a resurrection from the dead; an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Compared with this—to be for ever possessed by himself, and by all like-minded with himself—how poor the prospect of the occupation of Canaan for a few brief centuries, by a nation—all born of him, it is true, but, alas, not all partakers of that faith by which alone he was justified, and by which alone he or they could be saved. That, assuredly, was not the hope of Abraham's calling. No. He had lived by the power of the world to come, he rejoiced in hope of the glory to be revealed, and in this renewal of the Covenant he had his eye directed to no earthly prize but to heaven itself, and to God as constituting the blessedness of heaven—or, in a word, to the full enjoyment of God as his own and his children's portion for ever. *(Candlish.)*

As the call of Abraham was the first Divine act towards the formation of a Church, so in this renewed Covenant God revives the long-tried faith of His servant by opening up a wide and glorious prospect before him. 1. Countless multitudes of believing children. 2. Their unity in Him who is the true seed. Thus they are bound together into one sovereignty—a holy nation, a people for God's possession. 3. The intimate relation in which God stands to this true seed, and to all who are one with Him. 4. The glorious hope of an eternal inheritance, which they are to reach through the resurrection from the dead.

When Abraham was promised that his seed were to inherit the land, and that God was to be theirs for a perpetual possession, the thoughts of the patriarch would naturally be cast upon the future. He would feel that God was not granting to him blessings which vanish with life, but those which endure for ever. Thus would he be weaned from the world, and learn to fix the eye of his faith upon the larger prospect of the heavenly country.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 9—14.

THE COVENANT SEAL.

The Covenant with Abraham, which had been renewed, is now ratified by the additional confirmation of a sacramental pledge. The seal is now affixed. That outward sign does not *make* the blessings of the Covenant, but only *declares* them—taking for granted the validity of the previous transaction. It is the closing act of the whole negotiation of the believer's peace and fellowship with God.

I. Its spiritual significance. Abraham was now to become a father, not by his own will but according to the will of God. His carnal policy had failed, better hopes were raised within him. A prospect was before him, bright and important beyond all his former expectation. He was to be the human source of a sacred and gifted society—the Church of God. By the presence and the acknowledgement of a Divine guidance and authority, and by sacramental pledges, this Church must ever be distinct from the world. God now sets His seal upon this epoch which marks the founding of the visible Church. Circumcision had an important meaning considered as a *seal.* It authenticated God's signature to the Covenant, and executed it on His part. It was an instrument by which blessings were conveyed to those who in faith set their hands to this seal. It was a sign which parents put upon their children to show that they were devoted to God. It was the distinguishing mark of a holy and elect nation. But, besides all this, circumcision had a *spiritual* meaning. It taught, in a most impressive manner, certain deep truths about the soul and its relation to God. 1. *It taught the natural depravity of man.* Man was evil in the sight of God, not possessed any longer of that innocence and constancy in goodness which would secure the Divine favour. A new race, representing a regenerated people, was to be propagated; and therefore it was necessary that there should be this sign of holiness in the fountain head. Like baptism, circumcision teaches the uncleanness of the flesh, *i.e.*, of human nature. 2. *It taught the necessity of purification.* Human nature must be cleansed at its origin and source. The elect of God must separate themselves from evil. 3. *It taught regeneration.* A kingdom was to be set up, and men could not enter it by right of natural birth. They must be born again, and thus be made naturalised subjects of that kingdom. They enter it by miraculous means—by the favour of a new creation. Hence even the Old Testament dwells upon the necessity for the circumcision of the heart. A new heart can alone ensure a holy life. The stream cannot be pure as long as the fountain is polluted. 4. *It taught that God's people are to be distinguished from the children of this world.* The Israelites were distinguished from other nations by this outward mark on the flesh. That pointed to a vital distinction in the spiritual condition of men. This sign of the Covenant spoke of *faith in God*, who was to guarantee that the blessings it set forth would be bestowed. And *faith*—in the gospel usage of the term—is still the most real and conspicuous difference between man and man. This is the surest touchstone of the innermost nature of the heart. The Covenant of Promise is only for the children of faith. They who possess faith feel that they belong to a race having wider prospects, a nobler calling, and higher aspirations than the rest of mankind. They are marked off as the seed of promise. 5. *It taught dedication to God.* All who received this sign of the Covenant were bound to give themselves up to God. They were no longer their own. Each one bore in his body the marks of a heavenly calling, the sign of a perpetual obligation to serve God. 6. *It pointed to Christ, who does not come by natural generation.* The true bringer in of salvation was the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the promised seed. His human nature was pure from its source. Thus circumcision preaches the whole doctrine of salvation, its necessity, and the means by which it is brought about. It proclaims the soul's need—of the mortification of the flesh—of repentance—of a Saviour from sin.

II. **Its subjects.** The rite of circumcision was enjoined not only upon Abraham and his seed, but also upon all his servants or slaves, and upon all born of them in his house. Everyone connected with him by social or domestic ties must submit to this outward sign of the Covenant. In his capacity as a father and as a master he had to see that this rite was administered. Great principles and facts are involved in this description of the nature and extent of this duty. 1. *The principle of human responsibility.* God's blessings are not to be received passively by us without any thought or concern. We have to acknowledge, in God's own appointed way, that these good gifts bind us to the performance of duties. God originates Covenant mercies from His own free goodness, but we have to take our part in reference to them. We have to accept our obligation. 2. *That a man is accountable for the souls of those who are connected with him by social or domestic ties.* Abraham had to submit his servants and their offspring to this rite (verses 12, 13). The employers of labour should remember that their duties to those who are under them do not end with mere considerations of work and wages. Their humble dependents are something more than dumb machines. They have souls which are capable of receiving impressions for good or evil. They have spiritual interests of a surpassing nature which may be affected for weal or woe by the conduct of those whom Providence has placed over them. This is too often forgotten, as we may see by the confessions of human language which describes the employed as "hands." Men speak in a most careless manner in this regard, and do not consider the separate individuality of souls. Property and influence have their privileges, but they have also important duties. No differences of social position can discharge us from the duty of paying profound respect to the image of God in man. With religious men, all duty has reference to God and His purposes concerning the human race. 3. *That the Covenants of God are not narrow in their range.* The promised blessings were not only for Abraham and his seed, but also for all who were associated with him, even for "strangers." The area over which the Covenant mercy was to show itself was thus made very wide. This pointed to the wide charity and universality of the provisions of the Gospel. 4. *That in our duty to others there is an element of hope and encouragement* When Abraham imparted the sign of the Covenant to his children and servants, he would see that God had designed blessings for *them*. His duty would not be performed from a dry sense of obligation, but have an element of gladness in it arising from the thought of the blessings which it would convey to others. He who labours for the highest good of mankind is encouraged by the light of hope. The picture of Abraham's vast posterity was rendered bright and grateful to him by the thought that they, too, would receive the blessings of the Divine favour.

III. **Its obligation.** The Covenant rite was not a thing indifferent, to be performed or neglected at pleasure. It was binding on all to whom it was committed. 1. *Because God commanded it.* No one was free to refuse it on the ground that it was unnecessary, and had no real connection with the promised blessings. God commanded, and that was enough. He knows the reason why. God knows what is good for man, and what outward signs he requires to aid him in the apprehension of things spiritual. 2. *Because God's commands were hedged about by sanctions.* God gives more than mere *advice* to His creatures. He gives *law*, which draws after it penalties. An appeal is made not only to our sense of what is reasonable, but also to our sense of *fear.*

We have to consider that we are incurring *danger* by neglecting God's plain commands. What God has instituted and made binding upon us cannot be lightly set aside; for this implies contempt for the authority by which it was ordained, and of the grace of which it was the seal.

CIRCUMCISION AND CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

Abraham is circumcised on the eve of his becoming the father of the Messiah—when the holy seed is to spring from him; and all the faithful are to be circumcised till the holy seed is come. Hence one reason why this introductory seal of the Covenant is superseded, and another sacrament has been ordained in its place. Circumcision significantly pointed to the future birth of Christ, who was to be of the seed of Abraham. The birth being accomplished, the propriety of circumcision as a sacrament ceases. Any corresponding rite now must be not prospective, but retrospective; not looking forward to the beginning of the Messiah's work, as the righteousness of God, when in His birth He was shown to be His Holy One, and His Son by His miraculous conception in the Virgin's womb—but looking back to the end of His work, in His burial, when He was declared to be the Son of God with power, by His resurrection from the grave.

Such a rite, accordingly, is Baptism, as explained by the Apostle when he says, "We are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. vi. 4). Our baptism signifies our engrafting into Christ, as not merely born, but buried and risen again. It refers not to His entrance into the world, but to His leaving it. It is the symbol, not of His pure and holy birth merely, but of the purifying and cleansing efficacy of His precious blood shed upon the cross, and the power of His resurrection to life and glory. Abraham and the faithful of old were circumcised into His birth, His redemption being yet future; we are baptised into His death, His redemption being now past. The one sacrament was an emblem of purity, connected with a Saviour to be born; the other is an emblem of purity connected with a Saviour who liveth and was dead, and behold! is alive for evermore! Both circumcision and baptism denote the purging of the conscience from dead works, or from the condemnation and corruption of the old nature, through the real and living union of the believer with Christ—with Christ about to come in the flesh, in the one case; with Christ already come, in the other.—(*Candlish.*)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 9. Blessings imply obligations. God turns to man as the other party to the Covenant to remind him of his duty.

My Covenant. The Apostle informs us of the true nature of this ordinance, and thus of a *sacrament*, as such, that it is *a sign and seal*, in the passage in Romans which refers to this transaction. "And he received the *sign* of circumcision, the *seal* of the righteousness of the faith which he had, being yet uncircumcised" (Rom. iv. 11). It is an outward *sign* of an inward grace, and a *seal* also whereby the signature is formally attested and authenticated. As in a deed or instrument of conveyance, there is first the signature, and then the seal which confirms it, and in so far executes the instrument. But it needs also beyond that to be *delivered.* And this calls for the hand of *faith.*—(*Jacobus.*)

Verse 10. Circumcision, as the rainbow, might have been in existence before it was adopted as the token of a Covenant. The sign of the Covenant with Noah was a purely natural phenomenon and therefore entirely independent of man. That of the Abrahamic Covenant was an artificial process, and therefore, though prescribed by God, was dependent on the voluntary agency of man. The former marked the sovereignty of God in ratifying the Covenant, and ensuring its fulfilment, notwithstanding the mutability of man; the latter indicates the responsibility of man, the trust he places in the word of promise, and the assent he gives to the terms of the Divine mercy. The rainbow was the appropriate natural emblem of preservation from a flood, and the removal of the foreskin was the fit symbol of that removal of the old man and renewal of nature which qualified Abraham to be the parent of a holy seed. And as the former sign foreshadows an incorruptible inheritance, so the latter prepares the way for a holy seed, by which the holiness and the heritage will at length be universally extended.—(*Murphy.*)

Under the old covenant, as everything pointed forward to Christ the God-man—Son of Man—so every offering was to be a *male*, and every covenant rite was properly enough confined to the males. The females were regarded as acting in them, and represented by them. Under the New Testament this distinction is not appropriate. It is not "*male and female*" (Gal. iii. 28; Col. iii. 11).—*Jacobus.*

The appointment of this rite suited well with God's promise to multiply the seed of Abraham. This outward badge would serve for the attestation of that promise.

All who by Divine Providence are thrown into the midst of the family of God are bound to receive the Covenant sign. Hence the propriety of Christian baptism. The privileges of the Church are also duties. Men must be brought to acknowledge that they are not their own, and that their lives should be dedicated to God. They must be reminded whose they are, and whom they are bound to serve. Sacraments may be neglected, and many may prove unworthy of the grace they seal; yet that obligation which they signify still remains.

Verse 11. As a sign placed upon the foreskin, it designates still more definitely on the one side, that the corruption is one which has especially fallen upon or centres in the propagation of the race, and has an essential source of support in it, as, on the other side, it is a sign and seal that man is called to a new life, and also, that for this new life the conception and procreation should be consecrated and sanctified (John i. 13, 14).—*Lange.*

Sacramental Signs. 1. Are outward and visible. They impress the senses. 2. They teach spiritual truths. Circumcision was a teaching ordinance; so are baptism and the Lord's Supper. 3. They are the appointed channels of spiritual blessings. Though God is not tied to them, yet He promises grace to the worthy in their use. 4. They serve as perpetual reminders of God's grace, and of our own duty and responsibility.

Verses 12, 13. It is worthy of remark that in circumcision, after Abraham himself, the parent is the voluntary imponent, and the child merely the passive recipient of the sign of the Covenant. This is the first formal step in a godly education, in which the parent acknowledges his obligation to perform all the rest. It is also, on the command of God, the formal admission of the believing parents' offspring into the privileges of the Covenant, and therefore cheers the heart of the parent in entering upon the parental task. This admission cannot be reversed but by the deliberate rebellion of the child. The sign of the Covenant is also to be applied to every male in the household of Abraham. This indicates that the servant or serf stands in the relation of a child to his master or owner, who is therefore accountable for the soul of his serf, as for that of his son. It points out the applicability of the Covenant to others, as well as to the children of Abraham, and therefore its capability of universal extension when the fulness of time should come. It also intimates the very plain but often forgotten truth, that our obligation to obey God is not cancelled by our unwillingness. The serf is bound to have his child circumcised as long as God requires it, though he may be unwilling to comply with the Divine commandments.—*(Murphy).*

The fact that Abraham was bound to administer this rite, either to those who were unconscious of its meaning or to those who might be unwilling to receive it, shows that the acceptance of religious privileges is compulsory. Children born of Christian parents are compelled to become Christians, and in after life God holds them responsible for the right use of the privileges implied in that sacred name. They may complain of the appointment by which such things are thrust upon them—that others have chosen for them, but they cannot get rid of this law imposed on their nature, by which they are obliged to accept responsibility. They might as well try to abolish the law of gravitation, which also, in its way, may sometimes prove a tyranny. To everyone brought within the influence of religious privileges, is committed an uncontrollable destiny—the destiny of accountableness, the fate of being free, the unalienable prerogative of choosing between life and death.

We have to accept our religious privileges as we have to accept the fact of our birth. We can no more discharge ourselves from the one than we can annul the other.

It has pleased God to perpetuate religion by means of the family relation. Some amongst mankind shall be *born* to religious privileges which convey inalienable rights and obligations.

If the visible Church were a mere voluntary association, to make me a member of such a body in my infancy, and without my consent, might be held to be an unwarrantable infringement on my freedom of choice. But if the visible Church be God's ordinance, and not a mere contrivance or expedient of man, there is no absurdity and no injustice in the arrangement. If, while yet unconscious and incapable of consenting, I am enrolled and registered, and sealed as one of the household of God—if I am marked out from the womb as peculiarly His, by privilege, by promise, and by obligation—no wrong is done to me, nor is any restriction put upon me. If God makes me, by birth, the scion of a noble stock, the child and heir of an illustrious house, then, by my birth, I am necessarily invested with certain rights, and am bound to certain duties. I may refuse, in after life, to take the place assigned to me; I may never avail myself of its advantages; I may never realise my rank, or imbibe the spirit and enter into the high aims of my honourable calling. Still, if I live not according to my birth, the fault is my own. Whether I take advantage of it or not, my birth—in the plan and purpose of God's providence—had a meaning which might have actually stood me in good stead, if I had so chosen and willed it. So in regard to circumcision or baptism. If God makes me—by such a seal and pledge of grace imparted to me in infancy—a member of that society on earth which bears His name, I may never be in reality what that rite should signify to me. But not the less on that account has the rite a significancy, as implying a spiritual title and spiritual benefits, which are in themselves intended and fitted for my good. And if afterwards I wilfully refuse them, with the badge of them upon my person, it is with aggravated guilt, and at my own increased peril.—*(Candlish.)*

The privileges of a parent and of a master bring obligations with them to perform the duties implied in those relations. We should care for the eternal as well as the temporal interests of those committed to our charge; for all such duty should have reference to God who commands, and to the immortal nature of those on whom it is exercised.

The wide charity of the Gospel reveals itself even in what appears to be the exclusive dealings of God with mankind. Here is a provision for strangers to be admitted into the family of God. The privileges of the kingdom of God are not intended for a favoured few, but for all who are willing to receive them.

The rite of circumcision, though stated to be of eternal obligation, was yet destined to pass away when the better Covenant was established. Yet the grace signified, entering the hearts and purifying the lives of believers, would remain for ever. The essential part of God's Covenant abides. They have an enduring substance.

Verse 14. However it is to be understood, the threatening is a severe one, and shows conclusively with what reverence God would have His own ordinances regarded, especially those that bear so directly upon our spiritual interests. Having ordained that the sign and the promise should go together, it was at anyone's peril that he presumed to sunder them. Yet as God desireth mercy and not sacrifice, so the sickness or weakness of an infant might warrant the delay of the ceremony; and if one chanced to die before the eighth day, it was not to be supposed that this circumstance prejudiced its prospects of future happiness. The same remarks are, in their spirit, applicable to the ordinance of baptism. It is the avowed contempt of the ordinance, and not the providential exclusion from it, that makes us objects of God's displeasure. The directions here given are to be understood as not only addressed to Abraham personally, but in him to his natural seed in all generations. The reason assigned for this severe edict is, "He hath broken my Covenant"—*i.e.*, hath made prostrate, broken down, demolished, in opposition to the phrase, to establish, to make firm a covenant.—(*Bush.*)

Such is uniformly the Lord's manner of dealing with His people. When, in terms of the everlasting Covenant, He freely dispenses the richest spiritual blessings, He places His gift on the footing not of a privilege merely, but of a peremptory order. He not merely permits, and encourages, and invites; He straitly charges and authoritatively commands.—(*Candlish.*)

God does not propose His laws and ordinances for our consideration and acceptance at our own convenience. He still maintains His dignity as Lord; and while He seeks to win us by His gracious favour, at the same time demands our obedience.

The obligation of sacraments. 1. They are means of grace. They are for the strengthening of our soul—an aid to our minds in conceiving of spiritual things—they afford a greater security for our belief. We should not despise what is so freely offered for our benefit, and so graciously accommodated to our weakness. 2. They are commanded by God. His authority is paramount, and we should yield to it implicit obedience. God knows all the reasons of His appointments. Our business is to observe and do. 3. The wilful neglect of them is visited with God's displeasure. The culpable neglect of circumcision excluded men from the family of God's ancient Church. So the contempt and disregard of the Christian sacraments now expose men to the like danger. Every Christian ought not only to use the sacraments as means of grace, but also as occasions for making a public confession of religion, and distinguishing him from those who are strangers to the covenant of promise.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 15-22.

THE CLEARER REVELATION OF COVENANT BLESSINGS.

As the time draws nigh, the contents of the Covenant promise are described more circumstantially. In God's spiritual dealings with mankind the patience of faith is rewarded by a clearer discovery of His will. Obedience is the way to knowledge. The darkness in which faith commences turns to light in the end.

The lines along which God's gracious dealings are to proceed are now distinctly laid down before Abraham. The clearer revelation, in this instance, is marked by the same general characteristics as belong to the advance of Scripture.

I. **There is the announcement of things contrary to human expectation.** The promises which had hitherto been made to Abraham included much, but were announced in a vague form. He had cause to hope in God's Word, and he verily believed that he should be the father of many nations and kings, and a source of blessing to all the families of mankind. But he thought that the Divine purpose was to be fulfilled through that son which he already had. He thought he saw God's way, and the foundations of his future greatness already laid. But now he is told that this beginning of his great destiny has yet to be made—that the promised seed is to be born of Sarah. The child who was to transmit his life to remote generations, and on whom the promise of his great family depended, was to be born in an extraordinary manner and against the course of nature. Thus all his human calculations were disappointed. The blessing is to come through a different channel from what he expected, and by a way in which he never would be likely to look for it. Man is liable to fall into mistakes when he attempts to reason beforehand concerning what God shall reveal, or anticipates the course by which His will is to be accomplished. Thus God baffles the efforts of human wisdom to discover Himself and His ways, and ever shows us that His thoughts are not as our thoughts. 1. *Thus God preserves His own glory.* "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing" (Prov. xxv. 2). God hides His purpose from man until the time comes for Him to reveal it more clearly. This concealment must tend to His glory, for it is rendered necessary by His infinite superiority to us. We who are but of yesterday cannot scan the designs of Him who is from everlasting to everlasting. The child cannot comprehend at once the reasons of his father's dealings. If this be the case with respect to two finite minds, one of which is but a little in advance of the other, how much more must the plans of Infinite Wisdom be beyond the grasp of our narrow faculties! The great deep of God's judgments is to us unfathomable. 2. *Thus God preserves His independence of man.* He has no need of our suggestions or advice. How can we contribute any light to Him who is the Fountain of Light? God does not take us into His council chamber to confer with us as to how He shall execute His government. Abraham had need of this lesson, for he had adventured to lend aid to God in fulfilling His purposes. He must now learn that God is quite independent of man. 3. *Thus God humbles the pride of man.* If we could calculate beforehand what God shall reveal, or what blessings He shall bestow, we might be tempted to pride ourselves upon our clear and sure reason. Our humility is promoted by that arrangement which renders it impossible for us to discover what God is pleased to conceal. 4. *Thus piety is of necessity a life of faith.* God so deals with mankind that if they are to serve and please Him at all they must trust Him. We are made to know enough of His goodness to *commence* trusting Him; and He still keeps much hid from us so that we may *continue* to trust Him. Abraham would now have additional reason for maintaining that faith which he had already exercised. Thus the man of God goes from strength to strength because he is drawn onwards by the Infinite.

II. **There is an increased strain put upon the strength of our faith.** Ever since Abraham had been called of God he lived the life of faith. But now Providence gives him an opportunity for performing a supreme act of faith—one which gives a special character to his religious life, and makes him the model believer for all ages. His faith hitherto had leaned to a considerable extent on human supports. It had been aided by his own wishes, and by his favourable interpretation of the appearances of things. He thought that the process of fulfilment was already begun. But now his faith must stand alone, unsupported by any human aids, and resting solely upon the word of promise. All hope that the promised child should be born of Sarah had long ago been cast off, but now he is told that through her God's word is to be fulfilled. He stands now confronted with a natural impossibility. All his former hopes were destroyed. His faith is now challenged in the bare word of God. This is the point of resistance where the strength of his faith triumphed. "Against hope Abram believed in hope that he might become the father of many nations," etc. (Rom. iv. 18, 19.) The advance of revelation puts us in possession of enlarged knowledge, but, on the other hand, introduces us to new difficulties. Our faith is subjected to a severer strain. The word of the Lord tries us. 1. *God's gracious purpose is to throw our faith completely upon its own inherent power.* Faith, in order that it might stand at a fair advantage, must be perfectly free. *Faith must not be hampered by the operations of the intellect.* If Abraham had followed the suggestions of his reason he would have looked for the fulfilment of the promise in a direction different from that which God designed. Reasoning from what he knew, he must have been led to far other conclusions. Faith must not be subjected to any restrictions whatever. It should be able to brave and defy the impossible, and like the woman in the Gospel, to press on to its object through all difficulties. *Faith must not be hampered by the feelings of the heart.* Our feelings, sometimes, lead us to look for the accomplishment of God's Word in some way which His will has not ordained. Abraham's heart turned to Ishmael and felt that through this son already given the blessing would come. But God has His own way. Our human feelings must give place to His declared will. Faith must be bold and strong enough to overcome these when they stand in God's way. 2. *Faith must look to God alone.* Faith fastens solely upon the Word of God and allows no difficulties to come between. It has always a refuge in the goodness of His character, and in His power to accomplish; and with that is satisfied.

III. There is a revelation of human weakness in us. The faith of Abram, though it rose superior to trials, was yet mixed with some human weakness. 1. *The weakness of a thoughtless amazement.* The laugh of Abraham, when he heard the real direction of the promise, unquestionably had in it the elements of adoration and joy. But there was also in it a kind of unreflecting amazement—that unhealthy astonishment which paralyses. It was a joy which was yet half afraid. 2. *The weakness of doubt.* In verse 17, Abraham expresses a doubt. It was a momentary feeling, but at that time it rose irresistibly to the surface. The fact that he was an hundred years old and Sarah ninety presented a difficulty which seemed as if it would have overwhelmed him. The barrier of nature seemed to him as if it must prevail. When our pet schemes are suddenly dashed to the ground our first temptation is to doubt. We scarcely know where we are for the time, and we are taken in the moment of our weakness. God's revelation serves to bring our difficulties home to us. But true faith has a kind of elastic force, so it soon recovers itself when the momentary pressure is removed. 3. *The weakness of attempting to thrust our own way upon God.* Abraham still clings to the suggestions of his own mind and heart. He desired God to accept his existing son as the heir to the promise (Verse 18). He wished that Ishmael might live and be the appointed channel of the promised blessing. This is evidently the meaning of his prayer, though the contrary has been asserted by writers who are determined to find no flaw in the faith of Abraham. But the sacred historians are more true to nature. They paint men as they are, and not according to some desired ideal. Abraham had the natural impulse to thrust his own way upon God, and for the moment he could not repress it.

IV. There is an opportunity given for the glory of God's goodness to shine forth. In every fresh revelation God is but showing Himself to His servants.

He is showing His goodness more and more, and *that* is His glory. The qualities of the Divine goodness would now be manifested more clearly to the soul of Abraham. 1. *This is seen by the supernatural character of the blessings promised* (ver. 15, 16, 19). They were not to come in the ordinary course of nature, but in a way quite above and beyond it. They are thus seen to be manifestly Divine. They were above all that Abraham could ask or think. Such are the blessings of the Gospel revelation. They are supernatural. Such was Christ. He came not in the common way of nature, but was given to mankind by a supernatural grace. All the blessings of His Gospel are extraordinary, and wear the impress of the direct gifts of God's great goodness. They are those good and perfect gifts which come down from the Father of Lights. 2. *This is seen by the intrinsic excellence of the blessings promised.* It was not meet that the bond-woman should be the mother of the Covenant-seed. God, in His surpassing goodness, willed it that His promise should be fulfilled through a nobler person and one who would show an extraordinary instance of His power. Thus the blessing had all the qualities of dignity and importance. 3. *This is seen by God's gracious provision even for those human desires which betray imperfection.* God would remember Ishmael, after all, and in some way satisfy the yearnings of Abraham's heart (ver. 20). God does not chide His servant for those humanly natural longings. With all his imperfections, the heart of the patriarch was right at bottom, and his purpose to please God steady and sincere. If we have true faith, whatever desires there are in us which still betray some human imperfections, God will turn them into better courses, and show us His way. Amidst our ashes and smoke, if a spark of goodness is to be discovered in us, He will not quench it. We may, like His servant here, take all our griefs and anxieties to Him, even though they may show much human ignorance and infirmity. He will raise what is noble and destroy in us what is base. He has compassion upon our weakness, for "He knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are dust."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 15. Sarai is now formally taken into the Covenant, as she is to be the mother of the promised seed. Her name is therefore changed to Sarah, princess. Aptly is she so named, for she is to bear the child of promise, to become nations, and to be the mother of kings.—*(Murphy.)*

Hitherto, in this renewal of the Covenant, nothing has been said as to the line of descent in which it is to be established. Hagar's child is not formally set aside; the Covenant, as yet, is merely established generally in the seed of Abraham; and the father's affections, despairing of any other son, may still be set on Ishmael. But he must be completely stripped of all confidence in the flesh, and made to live by faith alone. It is not to a son born after the flesh, but to a son by promise that he is to look; not to one born of the bond-woman, and typical of the law of bondage, but to one born of the free-woman—the pledge of the law of liberty, even of the glorious liberty of the sons of God. The name of his wife, accordingly, as well as his own name, is changed. She is no longer "Sarai," my princess, as if she stood in that honourable relation to her husband alone; but Sarah, generally and without limitation, a princess, or the princess—the princely and royal mother of nations and kings, of the very nations and kings of whom, in Christ, Abraham is the father.—*(Candlish.)*

God gives the name before the thing signified, as a support to weak faith.

Verse 16. God's blessing is not a mere empty sentiment of goodwill, but a solid good expressed in the gifts of His kindness.

Faith is challenged upon the simple

word of promise, even against the impossible in nature. The soul must cast herself entirely upon God, leaving Him to deal with all difficulties.

God can bless His children by a way contrary to all appearances and natural prospects.

It was fitting that the Church of God, now to be established, should have a fair and noble origin. That Church, which is the kingdom of God, is a large and free fellowship. All her children are the sons of the free mother. (Gal. iv. 26.)

"Kings of people." The order which God's Providence has established in the political world suggests to our minds that order which He maintains in His spiritual kingdom. That kingdom is ruled by law, but yet it is a law which must be swallowed up in love. Not, indeed, that it is hereby repealed, but rather glorified and transfigured, the hard outlines of it scarcely visible in the light of that love which fills all.

This is the first express mention of the destined mother of the seed promised to Abraham. This annunciation would, of course, correct the error into which both she and her husband had fallen, imagining that the prospect of her having a child was hopeless, and therefore, if the promise were fulfilled at all, it must be in Ishmael. But now all mistake on that head is precluded. God will give to Abraham a son *of her*, and kings of people shall be *of her*. Their former fault in resorting to a carnal expedient is not to be allowed to stand in the way of the execution of God's purposes of mercy. The Divine goodness shines forth conspicuously in this, that notwithstanding men in their perverseness do so much to obstruct its course, it is still made to triumph over their unworthiness, and spend itself upon them, even in spite, as it were, of themselves.—*(Bush.)*

In our ignorance, we may think that we have found out what is God's way; but when He fulfils His faithful word to us, then we see what His way really is, and how far it is above and beyond ours.

The faithful children of God shall find that His mercies are above all they ask or think. Abraham could never have expected so extraordinary a blessing as is here promised.

"Yea, I will bless her." This is repeated for the greater comfort of this good old couple. I will doubly bless her, bless her with a witness.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 17. It is difficult to receive a great and extraordinary joy, at once, in all its fulness. We are, for the while, beside ourselves. Astonishment holds us, and our feelings require time to adjust themselves to conditions so altogether new and unlooked for.

The context shows that there was here nothing like contempt or derision of God's Word, but quite the contrary. "*Shall it be so indeed?*" Can this be? This that was only too good to be thought of, and too blessed a consummation of all his ancient hopes, to be now at this late day so distinctly assured to him by God Himself. Yet it would not be wonderful if he also in his laughter expressed a hidden doubt of what seemed in itself so absurd, so ridiculous in its more natural aspects. And if so, then we can also understand his meaning in the ensuing passage.—(*Jacobus.*)

In the region of unbelief the doubt is of no moment. It has its importance in the life of believers, where it presupposes faith, and leads as a transition step to a firmer faith. (There is, however, a twofold kind of doubt, without considering what is still a question, whether there is any reference to doubt in the text). Luther thinks that Christ points to this text in John viii. 56. Then the laughing also is an intimation of the overflowing joy which filled his heart, and belongs to his spiritual experiences.—(*Lange*).

When God's great goodness is suddenly manifested to the soul, it is not to be wondered at that there passes over it a momentary shade of doubt. The gifts of His goodness are of so wonderful a kind that it is one of the great difficulties of our faith to believe them.

Considering our present situation,

it is not surprising that obstacles should stand in the way of our perfect trust in God. The things of faith are far off and difficult to apprehend; they affect us but languidly; and we require considerable time to realise them at all.

Verse 18. A doubt immediately occurs which strikes a damp upon his pleasure: "The promise of another son destroys all my expectations with respect to him who is already given." Perhaps he must die to make room for the other; or, if not, he may be another Cain, who went out from the presence of the Lord. To what drawbacks are our best enjoyments subject in this world; and in many cases, owing to our going before the Lord in our hopes and schemes of happiness. When His plan comes to be put into execution, it interferes with ours; and there can be no doubt, in such a case, which must give place. If Abraham had waited God's time for the fulfilment of the promise, it would not have been accompanied with such an alloy; but having failed in this, after all his longing desires after it, it becomes in a manner unwelcome to him. What can he do or say in so delicate a situation? Grace would say—Accept the Divine promise with thankfulness. But nature struggles; the bowels of the father are troubled for Ishmael. In this state of mind he presumes to offer up a petition to heaven: "Oh that Ishmael might live before thee." Judging of the import of this petition by the answer, it would seem to mean, either that God would condescend to withdraw His promise of another son, and let Ishmael be the person, or, if that cannot be, that his life might be spared, and himself and his posterity be amongst the people of God, sharing the blessing, or being "heir with him" who should be born of Sarah.—(*Fuller.*)

The Syrian leper, when told to wash in the Jordan, that he might be clean, thought that he knew a shorter and better way: "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the rivers of Israel?" So Abraham, for the moment, hesitates to accept God's way without reserve and entirely. He still clings to his old hopes.

When God beckons us onwards to better and higher things, we still take the last lingering look of sense Through the strife of the flesh against the spirit, we come to the victory of faith.

The difficulties of our faith may arise from what God has already, in his goodness, given to us.

Life before God implies—1. A share in the Divine favour. 2. The power and impulse of serving God. The energy of life is necessary to enable us to do our duty. The proof that a man has vigorous life is found in the fact that he is able to work. 3. The enjoyment of God for ever. This is life in its noblest and best sense.

Verse 19. God does not withdraw His promises of better things, even though we may ask unworthily and strive to thrust our own way upon Him.

The assurance or conviction that God is true, and will fulfil His word, is the best cure for our doubt and hesitation.

When God accomplishes His designs concerning us we shall have occasion for great joy, even though His way should run contrary to all we had expected or desired.

Isaac. The name teaches that those who tread in the footsteps of Abraham's faith will at times find cause for laughter in the unexpected, sudden, and great blessings they receive. There is reason in God, both for weeping and laughter.—(*Roos.*)

This was to be the Covenant son—the son of promise—the type of Christ—the channel of blessings to the nations. (Rom. ix. 7.) God finds and prepares His own men to carry out His work in the world, and often refuses those whom we appoint and, perhaps, think more worthy.

No wrong is done to any one when God chooses certain men to carry out His great purposes; because they are chosen, not simply for their own sakes, but for the benefit of the race.

I will establish My Covenant with him. My spiritual Covenant, containing the promises of the Messiah, and all its related privileges and blessings. Yet, from the fact that Ishmael was commanded to be circumcised, and that the rite was perpetuated in his family, the inference would seem fairly drawn that the Covenant, in some of its aspects, did properly pertain to him. So far as it had a temporal bearing Ishmael seems to have been made as much a partaker in it as Isaac, and Esau as Jacob. Nor are we authorised to conclude from the circumstance of the Covenant in its more spiritual features being restricted to the line of Isaac, that, therefore, the line of Ishmael was in any way injured as to the prospect of eternal life. The Covenant of peculiarity was indeed more especially established with the former; but as many who were included in it might fail of salvation, so many who were excluded from it might still become heirs of salvation. The door of mercy was always open to every one who believed; and in every nation and in every age he that feared God and wrought righteousness was accepted of Him.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 20. God hears and answers even those prayers which are mixed up with much human imperfection and vain wishes.

Great blessings are not denied to those who are not included in God's special Covenants. The lack of privilege does not form an effectual bar to the Divine goodness, or shut out from salvation.

God chose one nation to preserve His truth in the world. But He formed other nations also. They were His ordinance, they stood in certain relations to Him, and therefore were under the obligation of duty towards Him.

Meanwhile Ishmael should not be cut off. God's Covenant with Isaac should not lead to the rejection and exclusion of Ishmael. He should also enjoy the Divine favour. Abraham's prayer for him was heard. His blessings were to be chiefly temporal. He should become great and powerful—occupy large districts; twelve princes should descend from him—as twelve from Jacob (ch. xxv. 12–16); and the dread of his name should inspire respect and fear. But the salvation of mankind was to proceed not in the channel of earthly conquests and grandeur, but of spiritual gifts.—(*Jacobus.*)

In this instance, also, let us behold the marvellous condescension of God, and the overflowing of His love. He is not offended at the pleading of His servant, or by the outpouring of his natural longings and desires. He hears them, and, as far as may be, He meets and answers them. Ishmael is to be blessed, though Isaac still must be the heir. What blessed encouragement have we, in this example, to lay aside all reserve in our intercourse with God. Freely and frankly we may unburthen our hearts to Him, and unbosom all our grief. Whatever be our care or anxiety, and whatever our wish, we may speak of it to Him. We may tell Him, as if in confidence, all that we feel and all that we desire. Our very groanings need not be hid, and are not hid from Him; the Spirit makes intercession with them, and God knows what they are. If only there be the presence of the Spirit, and if there be submission to the will of God He is not offended. For He is patient and pitiful. If it be possible, He will let the cup pass, or mingle some drop of soothing comfort in it; He will speak peace to us, and send strength from on high.—(*Candlish.*)

Great nations do not spring from chance, or from the selfishness of man, or from social contracts, or the assertion of the rights of rulers. God is their Maker, and He has given them their peculiar work on this earth.

The Jews had certain national peculiarities, and a special destiny to fulfil in the history of mankind. So had the Ishmaelites. "I will make *him* a great nation."

A great nation implies—1. Law and

order. 2. Energy and enterprise. 3. Patriotism. 4. Loving fellow-feeling. 5. The spirit of wisdom and understanding.

The peculiar features of national character are not to be regarded as a sad variety, or an injury to the harmony of the race. They are rather necessary to that harmony, and owe their existence to the appointment of God.

Verse 21. This is the thirteenth time that the Covenant is named in this chapter, saith an interpreter; and hereby is meant the promise of Christ and salvation by Him. A subject so sweet to every sanctified soul, that St. Paul cannot come off it. He names the Lord Jesus Christ ten times in ten verses (1 Cor. i. 1-10.) It was to him honey in his mouth, melody in his ear, joy in his heart.—(*Trapp.*)

Isaac, a type of Christ. 1. He is born in a miraculous manner. He was the child given by promise, and came not in the ordinary course of nature. So Christ was long promised and miraculously born. 2. He was the Son of the House, while all others were His servants. So the position of Christ in the heavenly household was made by His birth. No circumstances could alter his relationship to that household. He was there by a natural necessity. Others may come and go, but the Son abides. 3. He was the progenitor of a free race. Isaac was the son of the free-woman, and the ancestor of a great and free people. Christ makes men free when they are born into the kingdom of God by His spirit, and thus belong to that holy nation whose children walk in perfect liberty. 4. He was the channel of blessing to all nations. Christ was the life and power which gave effect to that blessing. He was that blessing itself.

Isaac, a type of the regenerate man. 1. He was born by a distinct act of the will of God. So the regenerate man becomes God's child, not by the course of nature, but by a special grace. He is eminently born of God. 2. He was free born. So each child of God is made free from all bondage. He needs not the commands of law to compel him to obedience, for he obeys from love of his Father. Thus Isaac was the type of the evangelical dispensation, as Ishmael was that of the legal.

In Holy Scripture, the points of time are laid down and determined along which we are able to trace those lines of history leading up to the manifestation of the Son of Man.

The Bible notices nations and men as they effect the development of God's kingdom. Isaac stood in a certain relation to that kingdom, therefore the exact time of his birth assumes a special importance, and the mention of it has an appropriate place in that Book whose subject is Christ.

Verse 22. Revelation continues only while the necessity for it lasts. God leaves off speaking with men, so that they may return to duty and service.

The moral miracle of the continued presence of God in immediate converse with us would be too much for our spiritual strength. Such a state of awe and rapture would put too severe a strain upon our faculties, and unfit us for the practical work of life.

Abraham was specially privileged in dealing with his God, who was personally present under some visible form. But all the children of faith can commune with God and receive His word. Miracles may pass away when the special reasons for them are no longer in force; but we still have prayer, by which we speak to God; and we still have the teaching of His Spirit, by which He reveals Himself to us.

There are those who, while they do not deny His existence, yet say that God has never spoken to man—that no revelation has been given. But shall we not render God justice? We claim for man the right of communicating his thoughts to his fellow man—the right of free speech. And shall not that right also be yielded to God? Is He who has given man the faculty of thought and speech to be precluded by any law of ours from disclosing His mind in language? There are reasons why God should speak. Revelation is necessary if we are ever to know Him and attain to His glory.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 23-27.

Obedience to the Divine Voice.

God had ceased speaking, and went up from Abraham (ver. 22). The end of every Divine revelation is not to satisfy curiosity, or even our desire of knowledge for its own sake, but to impart unto us light and strength for our *duty*. God's word is intended to teach us how to live. Nothing remained for Abraham but to do what he had heard. He had to turn all his thought and feeling into *action*. Like St. Paul, he was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision. We have here some characteristics of his obedience.

I. It was prompt. In that self-same day Abraham carried God's command into execution (ver. 23). He made haste and delayed not. He reasoned not with himself, he did not leisurely survey his duty, but rushed into it at once. When God once commands, so that we are clear as to what our duty really is, we should not hesitate, but immediately obey. 1. *To delay is to despise God's authority.* In some cases we have to dispute the commands of our fellow-creatures, because they may be unreasonable or opposed to virtue. But when such commands are lawful, when the authority is properly constituted, it is our duty to obey. To despise it is lawlessness. God's authority is paramount, and admits of no dispute. To refuse to submit at once to it is rebellion. 2. *It is safest to act upon moral impulses immediately.* In the affairs of this life, it is wise to act upon the maxim that "second thoughts are best." They often prove themselves to be a "wiser first." The prudence of business is deliberation—taking time to consider. The first prospects of schemes which promise us riches or advancement may be dazzling, but how often is the charm dissolved when we have taken time to weigh and consider. But this maxim of worldly prudence does not stand good in the things of religion. In all matters regarding duty and conscience *first thoughts are best.* On questions concerning the lawfulness of actions, the nature and obligation of duty, our first convictions are sure to be right. If we take time to consider we only give temptation the opportunity to acquire a dangerous strength. The light which comes from conscience is instantaneous, and our highest wisdom is to accept it at once as our guide. St. Paul, in giving an account of his conversion, tells us how he made no pause, but suddenly acted upon his conviction: "When it pleased God . . . to reveal His Son in me . . . *immediately* I conferred not with flesh and blood." Moral convictions are only weakened by delay to obey them. Our safety lies in turning them at once into duty.

II. It was unquestioning. Abraham did not begin to argue or dispute—to trouble himself with inquiries as to why such a painful rite had been so long delayed in his own case, or why it should be necessary at all. He stayed not to investigate the rational grounds of the command. It is sufficient for faith that God has spoken, and His will is both law and reason. Our position as creatures forbids all questioning. He who made us has the right to command us. He knows the reasons of all His dealings with us, though to us they seem obscure. The servants of God should have the spirit of true soldiers who have devoted their lives to maintain the honour and power of their country. "Their's not to reason why; their's but to do and die."

III. It was complete. God's word was literally obeyed, and in every particular. Abraham caused the command to be extended to all who were the subjects of it. His son was circumcised and all his servants. He did not exempt himself (verse 24). Thus obedience should not be partial, nor measured by our own inclinations, but should respect the whole of the commandment. A particular and intense regard to God's known will is the essence of piety. Thus did Abraham, and thus completely had he followed the Divine injunction given to him at this second stage of the Covenant—"Walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (verse 1).

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 23. That is, ordered it to be done; saw that it was done. As no express directions were given as to the operator, such agents might be employed as the head of the household saw fit. In Ex. iv. 25, we see a mother performing it; but in modern times it is usually performed by some experienced person; and it is not only considered a great honour to be a circumciser (*mohel*), but the occasion is made one of great rejoicing and festivity. The conduct of Abraham on this occasion furnished a bright example to all succeeding ages of the manner in which Divine ordinances should be complied with.—(*Bush.*)

It is necessary that all the circumstances belonging to positive ordinances should be minutely detailed. Hence the particular description here given.

In selecting Ishmael as the first to receive the token of the Covenant, the rest would be encouraged to follow. They would see that Abraham was in earnest. He began with those nearest and dearest to him. We can only hope to bring others into the ways of obedience when we first set the example ourselves.

Nothing was said as to the *time* at which Abraham should begin to perform this rite. But he makes haste to obey. Such is always the impulse of a truly devoted and affectionate heart. To delay in keeping His commandments is an evidence of lack of love for God and His law.

The fact that even those who were bought with Abraham's money submitted to this painful rite, is a proof of the strong influence of his religious character upon them. Not sudden enthusiasm, but a *life* of piety and obedience can command such influence.

It was a household dedication. The aged patriarch and the youthful son, and all the men-servants, no matter how they came into the household, were thus marked as sharers in the Covenant, and the patriarch's house was stamped in their very flesh as the Lord's. Domestic piety is beautiful. The Passover and Circumcision were both of them household seals, and so are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Everywhere there are the simple elements—a little bread and wine, and a little water—and what doth hinder? (Acts viii. 36). And God is faithful. Christ is the Head of His house, as the Covenant Son, in whom we have all blessings. Parental fidelity God covenants to bless (ch. xviii. 19). (*Jacobus*).

Verse 24. This obedience was yielded in *old age*, when the infirmity of nature is prone to plead off from engaging in anything new or different from that to which it has been accustomed. Yet it seems to be for the purpose of putting honour upon Abraham's obedience that it is so expressly said, "Ninety and nine years old was Abraham when he was circumcised." It is one of the temptations of old age to be tenacious of what we have believed and practised from our youth; to shut our eyes and ears to everything that may prove it to have been erroneous or defective, and to find excuses for being exempted from hard and dangerous duties. But Abraham to the last was ready to receive further instruction, and to do as he was commanded, leaving consequences with God.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 25. He commanded his children and his household after him, that they might keep the way of the Lord (ch. xviii. 19). This boy of thirteen years of age, poor Ishmael, might have claimed to judge for himself, if he had been so trained as to be left to himself. This is the age at which a boy became a son of the law, and was regarded as of age to take the Sacrament of the Passover—twelve to thirteen years of age. Jesus went up to the Passover at twelve. Ishmael was now thirteen. Children, when they come to such years of discretion, should be taught their duty in regard to assuming sacramental obligations, and coming forward to the full benefit of the Christian church.—(*Jacobus*).

Verses 26, 27. The head of the household is responsible for the religious training of those committed to his charge—his children, his servants. All should receive the signs of God's Covenant, and be placed in a position to obtain the blessings appended to it.

It is God's plan to make good men the centres of light and privilege to others. All who in any way come under their influence are placed at a superior advantage, and may partake with them of the same blessings.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Critical Notes.—**1. In the plains of Mamre.]** *Heb.* In the oaks, or in the oak-grove of Mamre. "*Mamre* was an ally of Abram, and under the shade of his oak-grove the patriarch dwelt in the interval between his residence at Bethel and at Beersheba" (ch. xiii. 18; xviii. 1). *(Jacobus.)* **Sat in the tent-door.]** The Orientals are in the habit of sitting at the open door of their tents in order to catch the cooling air in *the heat of the day.* The chief of the family occupies this prominent position, and keeps himself in readiness to go forth and greet the passing traveller. **In the heat of the day.]** "The dinner-hour, when they took their principal meal and their accustomed rest (ch. xliii. 16, 25; 1 Kings xx. 16; 2 Sam. iv. 5). The Arab, when he takes his meal, sits at the door of his tent, in order to observe and invite those who are passing. It is a custom in the East to eat before the door, and to invite to a share in the meal every passing stranger of respectable appearance." *(Knobel.)* **2. Three men.]** Angels, though men in outward appearance. In ch. xix. 1, they are expressly called angels. Heb. xiii. 1 plainly refers to this. One of the three is recognised as Jehovah. **Ran to meet them.]** "This is the habit in the East when it is some superior personage who appears. The sheikh comes out from the door of his tent and makes a low bow quite towards the ground, and sometimes conducts the stranger to his tent with every token of welcome." *(Jacobus.)* **Bowed himself.]** Probably nothing more than civil homage is intended, as he was then ignorant of the true character of his guests. **3. My Lord.]** One of the three is addressed as a superior personage. The name is used chiefly and specially of God, but often applied to men of high distinction and authority. It is stated (ver. 1) that Jehovah appeared to Abraham. **4. Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet.]** The Easterns walk in sandals with bare feet. The heat, with the irritation of the particles of sand, makes long journeys exceedingly painful. Therefore the first act of hospitality is to order servants to wash the feet of travellers. **Rest yourselves.]** *Heb.* Lean ye down and recline,—after the manner of the Easterns taking meals. **Under the tree.]** Collective singular for "trees," as his tent stood in a grove (ver. 1). **5. Comfort ye your hearts.]** *Heb.* Sustain—strengthen your hearts. Thus—Judges ix. 5—"Comfort (*Heb.* 'stay') your hearts with a morsel of bread." Hence bread is termed the *staff* of life (Isa. iii. 1). **6. Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal.]** *Heb.* Make ready three *seahs* of meal. A *seah* contained the third part of an ephah—a little over an English peck. **Make cakes upon the hearth.** The cakes were round and flat, and were baked upon the hot stones of the hearth (1 Kings xvii. 13). **7. A young man.]** *Heb.* The young man, *i.e.*, the servant. **8. Butter.** "The word, as used in the Bible, implies butter and cream in various states of consistence." *(Bush.)* Most commonly made from the milk of the goat. **He stood by them.]** *He* is emphatic in Heb. It is intended to mark the fact that he—the master—stood in the attitude of serving. **9. In the tent.]** In the women's apartments. **10. I will certainly return unto thee.]** *Heb.* Returning I will return. An emphatic form of affirmation. **According to the time of life.]** *Heb.* According to the living time. "A singularly ambiguous phrase, upon which a great variety of interpretations has been grafted. The most probable of these is that of the Persic version,—"According to the time of that which is born, or the birth, *i.e.*, according to the time necessary for the production of the living child, or at the end of nine months. This is, perhaps, confirmed by ch. xxi. 2." *(Bush.)* Generally understood to mean, when the year, now passing away, again revives, *i.e.*, during the next year. **Sarah heard it in the tent-door, which was behind him.]** *Heb.* In the entrance of the tent, and it was behind him. "The notice is apparently inserted to signify that the opening of the tent was behind the speaker, and consequently unseen by him." *(Alford.)* **12. My lord.]** A title of honour applied to her husband. Referred to in N.T. as an example to married women (1 Peter iii. 6). **13. The Lord.]** One of the three is Jehovah, who had appeared to Abraham. **14. Is anything too hard for the Lord?]** *Heb.* Is any word too wonderful for Jehovah? The very words used by the LXX. here are quoted by St. Luke in the speech of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary (Luke i. 37). **15. She was afraid.]** With amazement. St. Peter indirectly reflects upon her conduct (1 Pet. iii. 6). **To bring them on the way.]** The two-fold idea is involved of dismissing and accompanying. **17. That thing which I do.]** Which I purpose doing, or am about to do. **19. For I know him.]** *Heb.* For I have known him. "It is God's *purpose* with regard to Abraham, not His knowledge of the character of Abraham, that is here spoken of." *(Alford.)* **21. Whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it.]** *Heb.* Whether they have made completeness, or filled up the measure of their sins. **And if not, I will know.]** *Onk.* "But if they repent I will not take vengeance." **22. Stood yet.]** *Heb.* And LXX. have, Was standing yet. *Onk.* "Stood in prayer before the Lord." **23. The righteous with the wicked.]** *Heb.* A righteous man with a wicked one (Numb. xvi. 19-22; Psa. xi. 4-7). **25. That be far from Thee.]** The Heb. term expresses detestation of a thing as profane, abominable, and consequently that which was forbidden to be done. In all the parallel N.T. texts the *Gr.* is uniformly *μη γενοιτο*, and the A.V. "God forbid." **27. Dust and Ashes.]** In the Heb., which loves alliteration, *gaphar va-aipher:* dust in my origin, and ashes in my end. *(Alford.)* **33. And the Lord went His way.]** *Heb.* Jehovah departed. "Went His way" is too colloquial an expression to use in such an instance. **Abraham returned unto his place.]** To the grove of Mamre, where he was now residing.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-8.

THE DUTY OF HOSPITALITY.

This incident in Abraham's life was intended to show how God still further revealed Himself, but at the same time it affords us an example of the duty of entertaining strangers, of showing hospitality towards those who stand in need of such offices. Allowances must, of course, be made for the varying conditions of age, and country, and customs, but the *principle* of the duty itself is clear. Hospitality is represented here as a duty which may be regarded in three aspects—

I. As a common duty. Hospitality may be considered as one of the common duties of humanity as such—a duty which may be considered apart from all religious sanctions. It may spring merely from a natural feeling of kindness, from the instinct of compassion, and may look no higher than the interests of this present world. There are duties which men owe to one another, and which may be considered with reference to society alone. Offices of kindness promote the welfare of society, and increase the sum of human happiness. They make the ills of life more tolerable. If this world were all, men might be kind to one another from considerations of utility alone. The rigid adherence to what mere justice demands between man and man is not sufficient for human happiness. There is a higher law of love by which we are as much bound to do good to others as not to injure them, to supply their wants as not to rob them, to bind up their wounds as not to smite them with the fist of wickedness. There are duties which are due to humanity as such. Hence, when anyone refuses to save the life of a fellow creature, or to render help in some sudden and extraordinary necessity, we say that his conduct is *inhuman*. The cold sentiment of justice cannot compel a man to such deeds of kindness. These must be left to the common instincts of the human heart. But though such works of love are beautiful in themselves, and useful, still they may be done quite regardless of any relations in which we stand to God and the future. We may show kindness to a man from the impulse of a feeling exactly alike to that which prompts us to show kindness to a hound or a horse. There is a human charity which rises no higher than human and present interests. It is a loving-kindness which is *not* better than life.

II. **As a duty of piety.** In the case of a *religious* man there can be no duties which are contained in themselves, and having no reference to anything beyond them. With such, all duties have regard to the pleasure and will of God. Therefore they look beyond human interests and this transitory world. They are duties towards God at the same time that they are duties towards man. With the religious man no real separation can be made between these. You cannot isolate any particle of matter in the universe so that it shall not be influenced by any other. In like manner, you cannot isolate the duties of a believer in God, for they are all influenced by a constant force and tendency. Hence the morality taught to the Jews in their sacred books was superior, in this regard, to that of the nations around, for they inculcated duties for the reason that such were well-pleasing to God. Man should love his fellow-man, not merely as a human being having certain relations to society, but as one who stands also in certain relations to God, and one who is therefore to be loved for God's sake. Abraham was the type of the believer, and his hospitality was therefore rendered in the spirit of religion. This view of the subject ennobles all duties—1. *In their form.* They take a wider range, and regard higher and nobler issues. Virtues become transfigured into graces, and doing good into blessing. 2. *In their motive.* They have continual reference to the will and good pleasure of God. They approve themselves to the highest personal Will and Presence in the universe. Thus all duty becomes the loving service of the good God, who wills nothing but what is best. 3. *The best qualities of the soul are developed.* Abraham's conduct here was marked by love, humility, and reverence. He received the strangers graciously, and spread his best stores before them He was courteous in his behaviour, and lowly in his bearing towards those whose superiority evidently impressed him. These are the choice graces of the human soul, and train a man for the service and adoration of God. To do our duty upon the highest principle of all is to work in the very light of God's countenance, where the noblest things of the soul revive and flourish.

III. **As a duty which is prophetic of something beyond itself.** The fact that God holds an eternal relation to the souls of believers imparts a solemn grandeur and significance to all their actions. The smallest deeds done for God's sake acquire a boundless importance. Mary's deed, which is commended in the Gospel, was simple enough. She brake a box of costly ointment, and poured it on the head of Jesus. But He attributed a far-reaching purpose to that action of which she had no suspicion. "She is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying" (Mark xiv. 8). Thus there is a prophecy of greater things in actions which are done through faith and love to God. The loving heart has infinite depths in it all unknown to itself until the light of God enables us to see further down into them. As genius does not always know all it utters, so the faithful and loving heart cannot always relate what it holds. Such was the case with Abraham in this history. His duty rapidly rises in the form and meaning of it. 1. *He entertains men on the principles of common hospitality* (ver. 2). He saw three men, and paid them that respect which was due to their style and appearance. He treats them at first as visitors of distinction, but still *as men* (verses 3-8). 2. *He entertains angels.* After a while the truth dawns upon him that they are heavenly beings. He has really, in the language of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "entertained angels unawares" (Heb. xiii. 2.) His action thus extends to heaven. 3. *He enter-*

tains God (ver. 1). With the strangers he receives the Lord Himself. His duty thus reaches to the Most Highest. He has literally done all for God. The service of every believer, in whatsoever duty, must come to this at last. Abraham's case was peculiar as to the *form* of this visitation; still, the same thing really occurs to every spiritual man. His actions ultimately touch God. Jesus says of little acts of kindness done for the needy in His name, "Ye have done it unto me" (Matt. xxv. 40.) Everything that is like God leads at length to Him. The deeds of love, though they may be done for the good of men, are really rendered to God. With the believer every duty becomes a personal service to the Lord.

A Prelude to the Incarnation.

It has ever been God's method to prepare mankind, in various ways, for the subsequent revelations of His will. The whole of the Divine dealings with the Jewish nation had reference to something beyond themselves. They were a long and careful education for the times in which God would show His full purpose of love in Christ Jesus. In this appearance of God to Abraham we have a prelude to the Incarnation.

I. God appears as man. One of the three visitors is Jehovah, for it is expressly said that "the Lord (Jehovah) appeared unto him" (ver. 1). In verse 10, this heavenly visitant makes a promise whose conditions God alone could perform. Jehovah is represented as clothed in human flesh, as under human limitations; yet Abraham learns to distinguish Him as above mortal, and at length knows that God has visited him. Since then God has come to dwell in this world in the tabernacle of flesh, and became as man among men. This miracle of God's appearance to the patriarch was but foredating the grand miracle of the Incarnation.

II. God passes through the same experience as man. This was something more than a passing appearance. The angel Jehovah performs human actions, and passes through human conditions. 1. *He both speaks and listens to human words.* This Divine visitor converses freely with Abraham, and listens to his offer of hospitality. So God manifest in our nature spoke with human lips, and heard through ears of flesh the voices of men. 2. *He shares the common necessities of man.* This Divine visitor had no real need for food and refreshment, and yet He partakes of them. Jesus, though He had no need of us in the greatness and independence of His majesty, yet took our infirmities and necessities upon Him. He lived amongst men, eating and drinking with them, and partaking of the shelter they offered. 3. *As man he receives services from man.* Jehovah, under the appearance of a man, partook of the food and of the hospitable services which Abraham offered. So Christ, in the days of His flesh, received the attentions of human kindness, shelter, food, comfort. He had special friends, such as those of the household of Bethany, which He loved so well. He was grateful for every act of kindness done to Him. Though He came here in great humility, He was pleased to receive the reverential regard and homage of men; for this was but the tribute justly due to His glorious Majesty hidden beneath the veil of flesh. The reverence at first shown by Abraham would improve into adoration and worship; so beneath the human in Christ we come to perceive the Divine, and to worship Him as Lord of all.

III. God manifest is recognised only by the spiritual mind. Such appearances as this were not vouchsafed to the men of the world. He who was called "the friend of God" was alone thus privileged. The world around was ignorant of the true nature of this transaction. They knew not of any manifestation of God. So to unspiritual men Christ was not truly known as to what He really was. He could only be recognised by an eye favoured with spiritual vision.

"The world knew Him not." Men may hold, as a *doctrine*, that Christ has come in the flesh, and that He was truly God; and yet, without a living faith, they do not really *know* Him and feel His power. Abraham had that eye of faith which could discern God.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

This manifestation of God to Abraham was vouchsafed after his ready and faithful obedience to the command regarding circumcision. The obedience of faith brings a more intimate knowledge and recognition of God.

His own tent occupies a distinguished place among those of his household and attendants, standing near the path by which the casual wayfarer may be expected to pass. It is the hour of noon, and Abraham is on the watch for any weary pilgrim, to whom its sultry and scorching heat may make rest and refreshment welcome. The hour of noon, in that burning clime, suspends all labour, and compels the exhausted frame to seek repose. Abraham and his people repair severally to their tents, and make ready the homely meal. But first the patriarch takes his place at the tent-door, where usually is his seat of authority. And there he waits to see if any stranger is coming whom it may be his duty and privilege to entertain. Perhaps some of the remnant of the godly, still holding fast their faith amidst the abounding iniquity and universal idolatry of the land—not protected and blessed, as Abraham once was himself, by any pious Melchisedec, but persecuted and cast out by those among whom they dwelt—may be going about without a home, and may be glad of a day's shelter and a day's food. These the patriarch will delight to honour; and the recollection of his own early wanderings, as well as his love to them as brethren in the Lord, will open his heart towards them. Thus he sits for a little in the heat of the day, in his tent door, not idle, but intent on hospitable thoughts—"not forgetful to entertain strangers." On this day he is well rewarded for his hospitality. According to the saying of the apostle Heb. xiii. 2), "he entertains angels unawares." And not all of them created angels, even of the highest order. One, in the progress of this interview, discovers Himself to be the Angel of the Covenant—the Lord Himself.—*(Candlish).*

Times of leisure and repose specially fit us to receive Divine communications. The quietness which reigns around is well suited to the "still small voice."

God appeared, not solely for Abraham's sake, but in order to show that "His delights were with the sons of men" (Prov. viii. 31).

Verse 2. Whenever visitants from the celestial world appear to men, they have the form of man. This is the only form of a rational being known to us. It is not the design of God in revealing His mercy to us to make us acquainted with the whole nature of things. The science of things visible or invisible He leaves to our natural faculties to explore, as far as occasion allows. Hence we conclude that the celestial visitant is a real being, and that the form is a real form. But we are not entitled to infer that the human is the only or the proper form of such beings, or that they have any ordinary or constant form open to sense. We only discern that they are intelligent beings like ourselves, and, in order to manifest themselves to us as such, put on that form of intelligent creatures with which we are familiar, and in which they can intelligibly confer with us. For the same reason they speak the language of the party addressed, though, for ought we know, spiritual beings use none of the many languages of humanity, and have quite a different mode of communicating with one another.—*(Murphy.)*

The fact that God appeared as man is a proof to us that man is of a Divine race. Man does not begin from the fall, from the corruption of human nature, but a step higher up where he appears in the true image and glory of God. To think lightly of man is to think lightly of the Incarnation. There is some kind of fitness in man, as the image of God, of man's organs, his affections, and his life, to be the utterers and exponents of the life, yea, of all the heart of God.

The persons that now appeared at the tent-door of Abraham were certainly unknown to him. He was ignorant of their quality, their country, and their destination; yet his behaviour to them was as respectful as if they had been attended by a pompous retinue, or had sent a messenger to him beforehand announcing their names, and their intention of paying him a visit. With how much propriety the apostle inculcates the duty of hospitality from this incident will be obvious at once, and we may remark, in addition, that those who hold themselves in readiness to show kindness to the stranger and the traveller, may chance sometimes to be favoured with the presence of guests who will have it in their power and in their hearts to bless them as long as they live.—*(Bush.)*

He ran to meet them. 1. An instance of unsophisticated heartiness of nature. 2. An instance of a disposition to give and to bless.

Godliness does not place us above the necessity of observing the courtesies of human life, but even obliges us to practise them. The believer does that from principle and from love of God, which in the man of the world is the result of good breeding. The one is marked by simplicity and the absence of guile; the other scruples not to follow the arts of hypocrisy, and to disguise the worst feelings under the hollow forms of politeness.

Reverence towards man—towards all that is noble and godlike in man—prepares the soul for that supreme adoration which is due only to God.

Verses 3, 4. Abraham uses the word *Adoni*, denoting one having authority, whether Divine or not. This the Masorites mark as sacred, and apply the vowel-points proper to the word when it signifies God. These men in some way represent God. The Lord on this occasion appeared unto Abraham (ver. 1). The number is in this respect notable. Abraham addresses himself first to one person (ver. 3), then to more than one (ver. 4, 5). It is stated that "*they* said, So do (ver. 5), *they* did eat (ver. 8), *they* said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife?" (ver. 9). Then the singular number is resumed in the phrase, "And he said" (ver. 10), and at length, "The Lord said unto Abraham" (ver. 13), and then, "And he said" (ver. 15). Then, we are told, "*the men* rose up, and Abraham went with them" (ver. 16). Then we have, "the Lord said" twice (ver. 17, 20). And lastly it is said (ver. 22) "*the men* turned their faces and went towards Sodom, and Abraham was yet standing before the Lord." From this it appears that, of the three men, one at all events was the Lord, who, when the other two went towards Sodom, remained with Abraham while He made his intercession for Sodom, and afterwards He also went His way. We have here the first explicit instance of the Lord appearing as man to man, and holding familiar intercourse with him.—(*Murphy.*)

If now I have found favour in thy sight. Such was the Oriental form of salutation. The difficulty of the first address, on any new occasion, is felt by every man in his intercourse with the world; hence all languages have their regular forms of salutation.

We read of another heavenly visitant whose manner and speech possessed an indescribable charm, and who was urged to stay, in words similar to these.—(Luke xxiv. 29.)

Let a little water be fetched, and wash your feet. That is, have them washed, for this was performed by the servants, and not by the guests themselves. Water for the feet is a necessary and most grateful part of hospitality in the East. Where the people only wear sandals, which are intended only to protect the soles, the feet soon become foul and parched; and to have the feet and ankles bathed is the most gratifying of refreshments after that of quenching thirst. In passing through Hindoo villages, it is common to see this office performed for the weary traveller. In the sandy deserts of Arabia and the bordering countries, no covering for the feet can prevent the necessity for this refreshment at the end of a day's journey. The fine, impalpable dust penetrates all things, and, with the perspiration, produces an itching and feverish irritation, which, next to the quenching of his thirst, it is the first wish of a traveller to allay; and to uncover his feet, and to get water to wash them, is a prime object of attention. If sandals only are used, or the feet are entirely without defence, it becomes still more necessary to wash them after a journey.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 5. The courtesy of a godly man. 1. In his refined humility he diminishes the merit of every office he proposes to perform. If they are to be refreshed with water he calls it "a *little water*;" and if with food, he calls it "a *morsel* of bread." 2. He relieves the anxiety which his guests might have lest they should encroach upon his liberality. He says nothing regarding the best of the entertainments which he intends to provide for them. 3. He ascribes the opportunity for his benevolence to the Providence of God. "For therefore are ye come to your servant." God had so ordered things that these men should come to him at that time, and he was therefore bound to regard and treat them as if sent with that special purpose. He claimed no merit for this act of kindness. He was but the Lord's instrument. The piety of Abraham shines forth here. He habitually recognised a superintending and directing Providence. To an ordinary mind it was a thing of chance that a few strangers should pass by the door of a tent, but Abraham instinctively refers it to the ordering of heaven, and therefore he feels that he is only discharging a duty which God has laid upon him.

We should regard every opportunity of befriending our fellow-creatures as ordered by Divine Providence. The circumstances which call for benevolence, as well as the impulse of the feeling itself, come from Him.

Every occasion of doing good must be recognised as a call from God to do it.

Can finer or truer delicacy in the conferring of a benefit be imagined? Ah! it is godliness after all that is the best politeness. It is the saint who knows best how to be courteous. Other benefactors may be liberal, condescending, familiar. They may try to put the objects of their charity at their ease. Still there is ever something in their bountifulness which pains and depresses, and if it does not offend or degrade, at least inspires a certain sense of humiliation. But the servant of God has the real tact and taste which the work of doing good requires. And the secret is, that he does good as the servant of God. Like Abraham he feels himself, and he makes those whom he obliges feel that it is truly not a transaction between man and man, implying that greatness or grandeur on the one side, of which the want may be painfully realised on the other, but that all is of God, to whom giver and receiver are equally subject, and in whom both are one. Think of this, ye who complain of the ingratitude of the poor; and be not in haste to reckon your gifts unvalued and unrepaid. Be assured it is a bitter thing for man to be obliged to his fellow-man, unless the obligation be hallowed and sweetened by a sense of the part which God has in the transaction. Take Abraham's method if ye can. Imbibe Abraham's spirit: say, It is the Lord; my entertaining you is nothing; my serving you is nothing; "for therefore are ye come to your servant."—(*Candlish.*)

So do as thou hast said. Here is no empty form or idle ceremony; no affected disinclination to receive what is so frankly offered; no unmeaning compliments or apologies; no exaggerated professions of humility or gratitude. All is the simplicity of a generous heart and of sound sense.

It was the custom of St. Gregory, when he became Pope, to entertain every evening at his own table twelve poor men, in remembrance of the number of our Lord's apostles. One night, as he sat at supper with his guests, he saw, to his surprise, not twelve but thirteen seated at his table; and he called to his steward, and said to him, "Did not I command thee to invite twelve? and, behold! there are thirteen." And the steward told them over, and replied, "Holy Father, there are surely twelve only." And Gregory held his peace; and, after the meal, he called forth the unbidden guest, and asked him, "Who art thou?" And he replied: "I am the poor man whom thou didst formerly relieve; but my name is 'The Wonderful,' and through me thou shalt obtain whatever thou shalt ask of God." Then Gregory knew that he had entertained an angel, even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Verse 6. Abraham performs more than he had promised—causes preparations for his guests to be made, surpassing the simple offer of a "morsel of bread" and "a little water." There is a temperance and modesty in speech which is observed by every man of true nobility of mind and feeling.

The hasty preparation which follows is exactly after the Oriental fashion. The repast provided for the family will not suffice for these new guests. But the requisite addition is easily and quickly made. In the true primitive style, all in the house—the heads as well as the servants of the household—bestir themselves. Sarah prepares cakes. Abraham himself fetches a calf, which the young man hastens to dress. Butter and milk complete the entertainment, to which the three seeming travellers sit down; Abraham, meanwhile, doing the part of an attentive host, and courteously standing by them, while they eat under the tree. And yet, probably, he knows not who they are whom he is entertaining. But be they who they may, can we doubt that, in showing them this kindness, a glow of satisfaction fills his soul? And can Abraham long fail to detect, under their homely appearance, some traces of their heavenly character? They are not of the common class whom business or pleasure brings across his path. They are not like the ordinary inhabitants of the land. Their holy air and holy demeanour cannot be mistaken.—(*Candlish.*)

Abraham was a man of noble views, and a large heart; but he was not above attending to the little things of life. While he acted the part of a generous host, he knew what details were necessary to be carried out in order to entertain his guests. All the efficient characters in history, while they have been men of comprehension, have also been men of detail. Great generals not only conceive plans of vast extent, but the most minute particulars, which are to fill up those plans, are each and every one distinct to their mind's eye. In another way, St. Paul is an example of this faculty. There are great principles laid down in his epistles; and, at the same time, we observe a most circumstantial attention to the common affairs of life. No man can become great who is not a master of detail.

It seems very strange to us that in such an establishment as that of the patriarch there was not ready baked bread for the strangers. But the fact is, that in the East to this day, so much bread, and no more than will suffice for the household, is baked daily, as the common bread will not keep longer than a day in a warm climate. In villages and camps every family bakes it own bread; and while journeying in the East, we always found that the women of the families which entertained us always went to work immediately after our arrival, kneading the dough, and baking "cakes," generally on spacious round or oblong plates, of thin and soft bread, which were ready in an astonishingly short time. It may seem extra ordinary to see a lady of such distinction as Sarah, the wife of a powerful chief, occupied in this menial service. But even now this duty devolves on the women of every household; and among those who dwell in tents, the wife of the proudest chief is not above superintending the preparation of the bread, or even kneading and baking it with her own hands. Tamar, the daughter of a king, seems to have acquired distinction as a good baker of bread (2 Samuel xiii. 5-10); and there are few of the heavy duties which fall upon the women of the East, which they are more anxious to do well and get credit for, than this. It is among the first of an Eastern female's accomplishments.—(*Pictorial Bible.*)

Verse 7. Here was a well-ordered family; everyone knew his office, and did it. In every society, say the politicians, as in a well-tuned harp, the several strings must concur to make a harmony.—*(Trapp.)*

Here, again, the European reader is struck no less at the want of preparation than by the apparent rapidity with which the materials of a good feast were supplied. The dough was to be kneaded and the bread baked; and the meat had not only to be dressed, but killed. The fact is, the Orientals consume a very small quantity of animal food. In our own journeys, meat was never found ready killed, except in the large towns. There was, probably, not a morsel of meat in Abraham's camp in any shape whatever. Amongst the Arabs, and indeed other Eastern people, it is not unusual at their entertainments to serve up a lamb, or kid, that has been baked whole in a hole in the ground, which, after being heated and having received the carcass, is covered over with stones. It is less usual now in the East to kill a calf than it seems to have been in the times of the Bible. The Arabs, Turks, and others think it monstrous extravagance to kill an animal which becomes so large and valuable when full grown. This consideration seems to magnify Abraham's liberality in being so ready to kill a calf for strangers.—*(Bush.)*

Abraham, though an old man, ran to his herd to fetch his choice calf. True generosity is not content with easy sacrifices, and shrinks not from personal trouble and inconvenience.

Abraham entertained his guests—one of them being Divine—with a "fatted calf." So God entertains man with the choicest provision of His household (Luke xv. 23).

Verse 8. Abraham attended upon his guests. God is the guest of Abraham here. Abraham is His guest now and for ever (Matt. viii. 11).—*(Jacobus.)*

God, manifested through man's nature and form, becomes known to Abraham "in the breaking of bread" (Luke xxiv. 30, 31.)

God will prepare the best things for His people in the feast of glory.

It is a singular instance of condecension—the only recorded instance of the kind before the Incarnation. On other occasions this same illustrious Being appeared to the fathers, and conversed with them. And meat and drink were brought out to Him. But in these cases He turned the offered banquet into a sacrifice, in the smoke of which He ascended heavenward (Judges vi. 18-24; xiii. 15-21). Here He personally accepts the patriarch's hospitality, and partakes of his fare—a greater miracle still than the other, implying more intimate and gracious friendship, more unreserved familiarity. He sits under his tree, and shares his common meal. "Behold," says the same Lord to every believing child of Abraham, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," etc. (Rev. iii. 20). But above all, "If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John xiv. 23). "Be not," then, "forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. xiii. 2). They have entertained the messenger of the Covenant, the Lord Himself. But how may you have any chance of falling into this blessed mistake, and unawares entertaining Christ and His angels? Does He, or do they go about now in the guise of weary and wayworn pilgrims? What says the Lord Himself? "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me." "Whosoever shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me." Yes, every service performed to one of the Lord's little ones in a spirit like that of Abraham; every kindness shown to one who is, or who may be, a disciple of the Lord, is a service performed and a kindness shown to the Lord Himself. The Lord accepts it as such. What a thought is this! That in all your acts of courtesy and friendship,—of hospitality, of charity, of goodwill,—you may consider that it is the Lord Himself you are obliging! What a motive "to do good unto all men, especially those that are of the household of faith" (Gal. vi. 10). And think not that your thus entertaining Christ is a mere pleasing notion,—a fiction or a theory. Think not that it is to be practically realised only in the judgment of the great day as the principle upon which its final rewards are to be dispensed. Even now your thus entertaining Christ unawares may be matter of blessed experience. He manifests Himself to you on every occasion, however trifling, on which, in doing the least good to the very least of His brethren, you do it in faith as unto Himself. For such brotherly kindness opens your heart. It is the very best reply to His knocking. It brings near to you that Lord whom, in the person of one of His little ones, you have been honouring. You thus realise the fact of His entering in that "He may sup with you and you with Him." For at the supper you provide for any one of His little ones—He will not Himself be absent. Multiply, therefore, these offices of Christian love. Devise liberal things. Do good and communicate. Give as unto the Lord—that thus you may have more of His presence with you, and more of His love shed abroad in your hearts.—(*Candlish.*)

This Divine visitant condescends to feast with Abraham. Surely Abraham has now become the friend of God (James ii. 23). This feasting of God with man appears again in the progress of the dispensations of His grace—in the Shew-bread in the Temple, the Lord's Supper in the New Covenant, and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in the new world.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 9–15.

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN FEAR AND FAITH.

God had, hitherto, dealt with Abraham alone; now he deals with Sarah, as one of the parties to the Covenant. Abraham's faith was marked by some infirmity; and so is Sarah's in the present instance, but arising from a different cause. Her faith betrayed that weakness which comes of fear. The conflict between faith and fear, and the reasons of it are illustrated here.

I. The things promised to faith are difficult of belief. The Lord promised that Sarah herself should have a son. She received that announcement with mirthful incredulity. The thing was not to be thought of. How could the impossibilities of nature be overcome? (ver. 11, 12). That she should become a mother, was like calling the dead back to life. She was not really indisposed to believe what God had promised, still her thought was entirely directed to natural means. She was not ready to resign herself to a miracle. The world was old enough, and her experience was long enough to produce in her a fixed belief in the constancy of the course of nature. Faith in a course of things above and beyond nature, she had not yet fully realised. The things promised seemed too good to be true, and even impossible of accomplishment. 1. *It is*

necessary that faith should be thus tried by difficulty. If all is clear, and obvious, and easy, and present, it is quite impossible to exercise faith. In our present condition, we cannot walk by sight, for our knowledge is imperfect. If, therefore, we are to have an aim or a purpose beyond this present life, we must trust where we cannot see, and believe where we cannot demonstrate. The things God promises to faith are contrary to our present experience. We have no proof of them which commends itself to our ordinary reason. Faith stands to us instead of verification, and is its own proof. 2. *We must be cast entirely upon the word of God.* Nature may seem to be against us—and the possibilities of things, and human hopes—but our faith must surmount all.

II. Faith may, for awhile, be quite paralysed by fear. In a sincere mind, this very difficulty of belief may produce a fear which may perplex and trouble us. This was Sarah's case. Sudden fear tempted her to dissemble. She lost her presence of mind, and her guileless simplicity, and integrity (ver. 15). St. Peter, who holds her up as an example to godly matrons, hints at her infirmity, and suggests that she was "afraid with amazement" (1 Peter iii. 6). 1. *In sincere souls this condition is only momentary.* For a brief space faith endures a kind of suspended animation, but it has strength enough to recover. Fear is salutary when it is the instrument of caution, the guide of circumspection; but when it produces paleness and dread, it may serve for the time to overwhelm every other feeling. But if there is a real and loving desire towards God, the soul returns to sobriety, and faith lays hold on God. 2. *To accept God at His word would save us from all foolish wonder.* That which God promises may be amazing in itself, but if we accept His word simply, we are saved from that kind of wonder in which the mind loses itself, and by which effort is rendered impossible. True faith readily fastens upon the ultimate mystery, and therefore is amazed at nothing else. In this regard, "All things are possible to him that believeth."

III. God graciously grants power to overcome the fear. There is much forgiven to faith, if it is only real, at bottom, and in any way lays hold upon God. He will pardon its infirmities and repair its weaknesses. This he did in Sarah's case. 1. *By mild reproof.* "And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?" (ver. 13). This reproof is mixed with that tenderness which, while it chides, at the same time has a loving purpose, and raises up them that fall. God's reproofs to His children are but loving corrections. 2. *By recognising the good which is mixed up with our infirmity.* Sarah is commended for "doing well," and is held up as a model of matronly simplicity and subjection. She found favour in the sight of Him who is not easily provoked, and "who knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust." 3. *By repeating His promises.* The promise made in verse 10 is repeated in verse 14. It was doubted, and therefore is now renewed with additional force. After faith has triumphed over doubt, it is as if the word of God was again spoken to us. His promises have, as it were, the freshness of a new creation. 4. *By casting us upon His own omnipotence.* "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (ver. 14). This is the great refuge of faith when perplexed by apparent impossibilities. The thought of God's infinite power should put all our doubt to flight. Unbelief loses sight of the Divine omnipotence. True faith is supported by a power which cannot be baffled, or turned aside from its gracious purpose.

> **"The voice that rolls the stars along**
> **Speaks all the promises."**

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 9. It is now the question, not of the chief personage, but of the group of guests—a question which, in the East, from a stranger, would be regarded as impertinent, if not insulting, in our time; but in that day there was altogether more of dignified freedom and ease among the women, and such an inquiry would not be so regarded. Abraham must have been greatly surprised at this mention of his wife's name, with an inquiry after her, if he had not already recognised the Angel of the Covenant as one of strangers. Sarah was inside the tent, but near the entrance or doorway, where she could hear.—(*Jacobus.*)

When God inquires of us, the intent is to summon our attention and not to inform Himself. We cannot instruct Omniscience.

Behold, in the tent. David compares a good woman to the vines upon the walls of the house, because she cleaveth to her house. Others to a snail, that carrieth her house on her back. St Paul reckons it for a virtue in a woman to "keep at home" (Tit. ii. 5); and Solomon, for a sign of a lewd housewife, that "her feet abide not in her house" (Prov. vii. 11). Among the Grecians, the bride was carried through the streets in a chariot, the axletree was burnt, to signify that she must keep home.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 10. In the former verses the speaker did not make Himself known, but now there can be no doubt as to who He really is. The very nature of the communication now made implies self-determination and supreme authority. They are surely not the words of an ambassador, but of a sovereign. The personal God stands revealed in His word; and if we are faithful we shall at length know Himself by its means.

God's communications to man are marked—1. By positiveness and self-assertion. He speaks as the fountain of authority—as one who is able to accomplish His will against all difficulties. "I will certainly return unto thee." 2. By that Sovereignty which commands all time and events. God is not bound by the conditions of time as we are, but stands above and beyond it. He speaks of things that are not as though they were. In the eye of faith His word is equal to the event—the thing promised.

Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. He probably sat in such a manner relatively to the door of Sarah's tent that His back was turned towards it, so that if He had been a mere man He could not have noticed the fact of her laughing. That He was aware of it showed His Omniscience.

"The form of Abraham's tent, as thus described, seems to have been exactly like the one in which we sat; for in both there was a shaded open front, in which he could sit in the heat of the day, and yet be seen from afar off; and the apartment of the females, where Sarah was when he stated her to be *within* the tent, was immediately *behind* this, wherein she prepared the meal for the guests, and from whence she listened to their prophetic declaration."—(*Buckingham—Bush.*)

That discovery of ourselves—of what is in our inmost souls, which we find in the word of God, is one of the indications of its heavenly origin. The claim of Jesus to Divinity is in no small degree attested by the fact that He knew what was in man" (John ii. 25).

Verse 11. This statement is made to call attention to the miraculous nature of the promise. There is a Living Will above and beyond this present and visible course of things. Without faith in this, the outward universe is but a mere machine.

It should not be thought a thing incredible for God to bring new life to those who were as good as dead. Such a miracle is witnessed now when souls are born again. It is when we are literally "without strength" that God's grace is omnipotent to help and save (Rom. v. 6).

There must be a complete wreck of all human hopes before we are willing to cast ourselves entirely upon God. We must be taught that God is all in all. In the Divine education of humanity men have been made to feel the necessity for God's interference. Before Christ came some of the great nations of antiquity had perished, and even Rome itself was fast hastening to decay. The world had outlived all its hopes. Then the Saviour appeared, and his fulness answered to man's emptiness.

Verse 12. God's promises seem absurd and ridiculous, many of them, to human reason, which therefore must be silenced and shut out, as Hagar was; for it will argue carnally as that unbelieving lord (2 Kings vii. 2) storms at God's offers; as Naaman at the message (2 Kings v. 11) looks upon God's Jordan with Syrian eyes, as he, and after all, cries out with Nicodemus, "How can these things be (John iii. 4)? measuring God by its own model, and casting Him into its own mould.—(*Trapp.*)

Sarah's laughter was that of incredulity. She had human reason on her side. It was the laughter of rationalism, declaring that impossible which it is unwilling to believe.

Sarah's laughter was yet but a momentary feeling, not indicative of a *habit* of life. Hence it fell short of the impious and profane. She laid too much stress upon the necessity of natural means, and failed to give God His true glory.

Abraham and Sarah did not more agree in their desire than differ in their affection. Abraham laughed because he believed it would be so, Sarah because she believed it could not be so.—(*Bishop Hall.*)

My lord being old also. This passage, taken in connection with another which contains an allusion to it, affords a striking proof how ready God is to mark whatever is good in our actions, while He casts a veil over the evil with which it is accompanied. At the very time that Sarah yielded to unbelief she exercised a reverential regard for her husband, and this fact is recorded to her honour by the Apostle Peter, and proposed as an example to all married women, while the infirmity that she betrayed on the same occasion is passed over in silence (1 Pet. iii. 5, 6). The Scriptures afford numerous instances in which God has manifested the same condescension to His frail and sinful creatures. The existence of "some good thing towards the Lord" even avails, as in the case of young Abijah (1 Kings xiv. 13), to turn away the eye of Jehovah from manifold imperfections in other respects. This is a great encouragement to us amidst all the weakness that we feel; and we may be assured that if, on the one hand, the evils of our hearts will be disclosed, so, on the other, there is not a good purpose or inclination that shall not be made manifest and abundantly rewarded in the great day.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 13. The speaker is here disclosed as "*Jehovah—the Lord*" who had appeared unto Abraham (ver. 1).

It would serve to bring home the reproof to Sarah's mind to find that her husband was called to account for her fault.

The wife's sin reflects upon the husband. But Solomon shows that some wives are so intemperate and wilful that a man may as well hide the wind in his fist or oil in his hand as restrain them from ill-doing (Prov. xxvii. 15, 16).—(*Trapp.*)

We have to bear the burdens and infirmities of those who are partakers with us of the same promises.

Verse 14. Sarah laughed within herself, within the tent and behind the speaker; yet to her surprise her internal feelings are known to Him. She finds there is One present who rises above the sphere of nature.—(*Murphy.*)

The thought of God's power ought to silence every objection arising from apparent impossibilities. We have sufficient examples of His power to encourage us to hope in His Word. He formed the universe out of nothing by a simple act of His will. He still preserves the whole course of nature. He supplies the wants of every living creature upon earth. Did we but reflect upon the miracle of creation alone, we could never indulge in that unbelief which calls the power of God in question.

When all human hope is lost, and nature seems to bind us fast as with an iron destiny, we may well comfort ourselves with the thought: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

At the time appointed I will return. It is humiliating to think what a necessity our unbelief imposes upon God to impart and renew His promises to us; and the earnestness with which the promise so often given is here repeated, shows the just displeasure which Sarah's incredulity had excited in the bosom of God. We cannot, indeed, but be filled with amazement that He did not rather say, "Since you treat My promises with secret derision, you shall never be made partaker of them." But God well knows the weakness of the human heart, and therefore deals tenderly with offenders. Were He to suffer our unbelief to make void His truth, no one of His promises would ever be fulfilled. But He has assured us that this shall not be the case; and if anything will put to shame our unbelief, surely this will. Such condescension and compassion cannot but prevail upon us more forcibly than a thousand menaces. —(*Bush.*)

The repeated lessons of instruction and words of promise which are found in Scripture bear witness to human infirmity—to our slowness of heart to believe and receive what God has spoken.

Verse 15. In her confusion and terror she denies that she laughed. But He who sees what is within insists that she did laugh, at least in the thought of her heart. There is a beautiful simplicity in the whole scene. Sarah now doubtless received faith and strength to conceive.—*(Murphy).*

Fear perverts the moral perceptions, and tempts us to shelter ourselves under unworthy subterfuges.

Sarah had not laughed outwardly, with visible contempt and derision, but she could not cover up her sin from God. He can detect what is evil in us, however it may be disguised by outward propriety.

This brief and sharp reproof was yet like the wound of a friend, which is faithful. It was in mercy, not in anger, that her secret sin was detected and reproved. We hear no more of her unbelief after this reproof. Her faith was hereby confirmed and established, and became the very instrument for the accomplishing of that promise which she once disbelieved (Heb. xi. 11).

We ought to be grateful for the fidelity of those friends who reprove us, and for the rebukes of our own conscience. We should accept these, as if the Lord had spoken.

If we only consider what is that perfect knowledge which God has of us, all unworthy fear would be driven from our hearts. We should then have only one object of amazement and wonder. Nothing else could make us afraid.

Let us be careful that God never sees in our countenance the smile of distrust, the sneer of derision at His promises, His precepts, His people. The profane joke, the contemptuous epithet, the supercilious sneer, the open ridicule, the downright mockery of the saints, are all registered. *"Nay, but thou didst laugh,"* will continue to awaken new pains of remorse in the soul of the scorner when he and laughter shall have long been strangers, and when tears, and sighing, and mourning shall have become his portion; for of laughter such as this the word of God has pronounced: "The end of that mirth is heaviness;" "Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep."—(*Bush.*)

She was afraid. And well she might; for as every body hath its shadow, so hath every sin its fear. She laughed, but within herself, but as good she might have laughed out aloud; for God searcheth the heart. "I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was in my country?" (Jonah iv. 2). No, Jonah, it was not thy saying, it was only thy thinking; but that is all one before Him who "understandeth thy thoughts afar off" (Psa. cxxxix. 2).—(*Trapp.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 16-19.

THE SECRET OF THE LORD WITH ABRAHAM.

We are told that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him" (Psa. xxv. 14). God communicates Himself, and the knowledge of His ways and designs, to His faithful ones. There was a special propriety for this mode of dealing with His servant Abraham. Consider this—

I. As one of the privileges of God's friendship with him. Communication of secrets is one of the special privileges of friendship. The secret of a man is not with strangers, or enemies, or indifferent persons, but with those who respect and love him. Where we trust our secrets the intimacy must be very close, and the confidence of love very great. God had made Abraham His friend, and in doing so had yielded to him certain rights. He who is the sovereign Lord of all put Himself under obligations. He imparted to His friend a two-fold secret. 1. *The secret of loving intercourse.* He had already condescended to visit Abraham, and to partake of his hospitality. He conversed freely with the patriarch as a man with his friend. Though He discovered Himself to be what He really was, the human manner of the interview is carried out to the end. This is the only instance in the Old Testament of such intimate and palpable communion with God. Abraham's case was only peculiar in its outward form, for it is the privilege of all God's saints to "enter into the secret place of the Most High, and to abide under the shadow of the Almighty." 2. *The secret of His purposes.* The Lord had already told Abraham of His loving purpose concerning himself, and the nation of which he was to be the founder. Now the Lord reveals His purposes of judgment upon the wicked. The sin of Sodom had become great. The Divine forbearance was exhausted. The time of judgment had come. In adaptation to our human mode of thought and speech, God is represented as taking counsel with Himself as to what He shall purpose. "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" (ver. 17). It seems as if the very thought would be unworthy, that He should conceal His design from His friend. "Strangers and enemies—the world at large—know Me not; and therefore they know not what I do. They know merely what is outwardly presented to their eye, on the stage of public and social life. But they see not behind the scenes. They are not acquainted with the hidden springs, and inmost reasons of My conduct. Hence, it is not wonderful that they should misunderstand Me; that they should put a wrong construction on many of My actions; that many things in My dealings should seem anomalous or even criminal, of which, had they been better acquainted with Me, they might easily have got an explanation. But my friends stand in My counsel. They are familiar with Me, and their fullest sympathy is Mine. They can therefore understand what I do. What may seem strange and startling to others, excites no surprise, and breeds no suspicion, in them; and where the world is loud in its premature criticisms and cavils—My friends, doing Me justice, and reposing in Me an honourable confidence, can intelligently acquit or approve; or at least can patiently wait for further light and information—fearless, as regards My character, of the issue.—*(Candlish.)*

II. As depending upon his destiny and character. Abraham was not only a saint, but also a representative man, through whom God intended to convey great blessings to mankind. He was the human foundation upon which God's most gracious purposes concerning the race were to be erected. The friendship of God with him, therefore, is to be considered—1. *With regard to his destiny.* God had known him, that is, determined him for a purpose. (1.) *Political.* He was to "become a great and mighty nation" (ver. 18). The founding of a great nation is an act of God's Providence, and not an accident of human history. Abraham has, therefore, an interest in humanity considered as such. Therefore this act of retribution on Sodom must not be regarded as a matter of indifference to him. In the thought and purpose of God he has a sublime relation to a noble race, and the knowledge of the Divine purposes concerning that race was, in a measure, due to him. Of such a character as Abraham it was true in a most special and eminent sense, that all that concerned man concerned him. (2.) *Religious.* Abraham was to be the founder not only of a great, but also of a holy nation—of a people elect of God. They were chosen to illustrate His Providence, to have the custody of His oracles. The awful scroll of prophecy was in their keeping. God's salvation was to spring from them. They stood at one end of the ladder along which communications passed from heaven to earth, and blessings came down. "All the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him" (ver. 18). Hence he is personally and directly concerned with all God's dealings of mercy and judgment. As a member of the Covenant, these privileges were due to Abraham. 2. *With regard to his personal character.* God knew that Abraham was a righteous man, and that he would be just and upright in the government of his family, bringing them up in the fear and love of Himself. So would they enjoy the benefits of the Covenant of grace, and avoid the doom of the wicked. "For the transmission from generation to generation of the true knowledge and worship of God, it is essential that they who are to command and teach their children after them should themselves understand the scheme of God's providence, so as to be well acquainted with what He has done, and is yet to do, on the earth. Abraham is highly commended by God, as one who will assuredly be faithful in this work of the godly training and godly discipline of his household. As the head of a family—as a witness for God to the generation to come—as a teacher of righteousness, he is entrusted with a most important office, and he will not betray his trust."—*(Candlish.)*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 16. The courteous dismissal of friends and brethren who have been entertained as guests, by accompanying them some distance on their way, is a duty frequently enjoined in the New Testament. Thus, 3 John 6: "Whom if thou *bring forward on their journey* after a godly sort, thou shalt do well." (See also Rom. xv. 24; 1 Cor. xvi. 11; Acts xx. 38.) From verse 22, it would appear that it was only the two angels who now took their leave. He who is called "Jehovah" seems to have remained, and Abraham, after conducting the two some little distance, probably returned into the presence of his Divine guest, when the circumstances afterwards mentioned occurred.—*(Bush.)*

There is a gracious side to the Divine character, in which appear the purposes of His love and mercy; but there is also a side of it in which we see only His judgments towards the impenitent. Towards *Abraham*, the look of kindness and love; towards *Sodom*, the look of fearful indignation and purpose of retribution. The right hand of the Judge implies His left.

Verse 17. He is in a position to be trusted. He is not a stranger or an enemy who must be kept at a distance and treated with stern and suspicious reserve. He stands high in the favour and fellowship of God, and it is not unreasonable that God should impart to him an intimate knowledge of His works and ways. (Psa. xxv. 14.) Hence the Lord speaks of His prophets as those who should stand in His counsel, or secret. (Jer. xxiii. 18-22; Amos iii. 7.) And it is especially with reference to His judgments to be executed on the earth that the Lord thus speaks. To the friend of God, these visitations of vengeance are not, as they appear to other men, mere accidents of fortune, or sudden outbreaks of capricious wrath. To him they have a clear meaning—a distinct and well-defined end. And hence, while others are distracted and overwhelmed, he stands fearless amid the ruin.—*(Candlish.)*

If we are the friends of God through Christ we are admitted into His confidence. Jesus calls us His friends (St. John xv. 15.) 1. We are delivered from all slavish fear. 2. We have no longer any suspicion of God. All cold reserve and distrust are gone, and we enter into all the plans and purposes of His grace. 3. We have full confidence in God's righteousness. The difficulties in the ways and dealings of Providence, which perplex others, all become intelligible to the friend of God. He reveals to His friends what shall be in the end, when a perfect adjustment of these shall be made.

The secret of the Lord concerning judgment is also intended for our admonition. The judgments of the Lord "warn" His servants. (Psa. xix. 11.)

Verse 18. We have in this and the following verse the reasons assigned for the decision to which He comes. The first is, the dignity and importance of His character, and the great things which He had purposed to do for him. It is a reason *à fortiori*; as if He had said, "Seeing I have determined to bestow upon Abraham the greater favour of making him a great nation, and of blessing in him all other nations, surely I may confer upon him the less, of making him acquainted with My present purpose of destroying Sodom." Where God has begun to do good to His servants He follows them with still accumulating mercies. The past is a pledge for the future, and they may, like Rachel, name their blessings "Joseph," saying, "The Lord will yet *add* another.—(*Bush.*)

The revelation to Abraham of the Divine purposes of judgment would serve: 1. As a vindication of God's character in the matter of punishment. God had made known unto him His purposes of grace, and He will now vindicate Himself in regard to His judgments upon the wicked. 2. As a motive to increase the sense of covenant obligation. Abraham would now have stronger reason for fidelity in his household, for he was to be the source of blessing to all mankind. His family was to be the home of salvation where men would find shelter from the terrible judgments of God.

FAMILY RELIGION.—*Verse* 19.

I. The light in which Abraham appears in this passage; and how he was qualified for the duty here ascribed to him. He appears a man of *knowledge;* not, perhaps, in the jargon of language, the refinements of science, or the subtleties of speculation, but in matters of the greatest moment to his own present and everlasting salvation, and that of others, namely, in religion and morality, here termed the "way of the Lord," "justice and judgment."—A man of *piety.* He not only understood the way of the Lord, but he loved, experienced, and practised it. Hence his concern and endeavour to impress it upon others. Without personal religion in the heads of families, we cannot expect they will sincerely and perseveringly endeavour to promote it in their children or servants.—A man of *virtue.* Justice and judgment were as dear to him, and as much practised by him, as "the way of the Lord." He did not make his doing his duty to God a reason for neglecting his duty to his neighbour; nor what God had joined together did he put asunder.—A man of *authority.* "He will *command* his children and his household after him." Observe the respect and obedience he enforced, and his great influence over his family. This was owing to his *station.* They were taught to acknowledge him as appointed by God at the head of the family—to his *knowledge* and *wisdom*—his known and approved *piety.* They knew God was on his side, and if they opposed him, God would resent it.—A man of *fidelity.* Whatever knowledge, piety, or authority he had, he faithfully employed for His glory who entrusted him with them, and to the end intended—the good of others, and especially of his own family.—A man of *diligence.* He appears evidently to have been laborious in this duty.

II. The nature of this duty; or his endeavours for the good of his family. He not only prayed *with* and *before* his family, but interceded for them as a *priest.* This the ancient patriarchs and holy men of old did. They were priests in their own houses (Job i. 5). So should every master of a Christian family be. Indeed, every private Christian is a priest unto God. He was a *prophet* in his family. He instructed them, not in matters of mere speculation, nor doubtful disputation—this were foolish and unprofitable—but in matters of experimental and practical religion and virtue. He taught his family not barely to know these things, but to do them. Now, upon whom must this be inculcated? Upon *children* (Deut. iv. 9). If our children be the Lord's, they must be educated for Him. If they wear His livery, and be called by His name, they must do His work. What hypocrisy is it to dedicate our children to God in baptism, and promise they shall "renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, and all covetous desires of the same, so that they shall not follow nor be led by them," and afterwards to take no care that they may fulfil it!—Upon *servants.* Abraham had born in his house three hundred and eighteen servants (ch. xiv. 14), "trained," or, as the Hebrew word means, *catechised.* Our servants are entrusted to our care, and should be taught and directed by us while in our family. But how must our children and servants be instructed? (Deut. vi. 6, etc.). By conversation, advice, exhortation, reading, hearing, catechising, etc., and especially by teaching them to "know the Scriptures" (2 Tim. iii. 15.) He was a *king* in his house, and used authority. He not only recommended these things, and advised and set before them the advantages on the one hand, and the miseries on the other, or the conduct which they might pursue, but he solemnly enjoined and insisted on these things, on pain of incurring his displeasure, as well as that of God. He not only used *doctrine*, but *discipline* (Eph. vi. 4). He not only informed the understanding of his children and domestics by doctrine, and reminded and admonished them, but he persuaded, turned, and subdued the will to God and man, as far as possible, by discipline, rewards, punishments, or corrections, especially with regard to his children.

III. How pleasing it was to God, and the blessed consequences thereof to Abraham and his family. Observe:—The reason why God would hide nothing from Abraham. "For I know him," etc. Abraham was communicative of his knowledge, and improved it to the good of those under his care, and therefore God resolved to make communications to him. The way to the accomplishment of God's promises: "That the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him." Family blessings arise from family religion;—temperance, frugality, industry, discretion—peace, quietness, love, harmony—the favour, protection, and care of God; His direction and aid—all necessaries (Psalm xxxvii. 25; Matt. vi. 33)—prosperity, as far as will be good for us, and our families. Our prayers are heard—afflictions are sanctified to us, and we are supported under them—we make a comfortable progress together in the ways of God, and receive many spiritual blessings—we shall meet in His presence and kingdom hereafter, and spend an eternity together. The sad reverse when this course is not taken. Hence arise family curses;—intemperance, prodigality, idleness, imprudence—strife, contention, hatred, disturbance—the displeasure of God, and His curse on all we do—not even necessaries, perhaps, but beggary and want—nothing prospers—our prayers are rejected—we are abandoned of God in our afflictions, and hardened by them—we go forward miserably in the ways of the devil—we shall meet at the left hand of the Judge in the great day.—*(Rev. J. Benson's Sermons and Plans.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 20–22.

God's Judgments on Nations.

Though every man must give an account for himself to God at the last day, yet Providence does visit judgment upon nations, *as such*, in this world. Nations have no existence in the future life, and therefore must be punished in this life. Hence religious minds read some awful lessons in human history. They see the punishments of Divine justice visited upon communities of sinners. We have here God's threatening of judgment upon a wicked nation; a threatening which was as sure as doom; for they had exhausted the Divine forbearance, and there was no more space for repentance. God's judgments upon nations have the same general characteristics as this one upon Sodom and Gomorrah.

I. **They are preceded by a long history of wickedness.** God's retribution does not fall until the harvest of sin is ripe. The wickedness of this people had grown so great as to become proverbial. (Isa. i. 9.) A community must have existed for some time before it can give rise to proverbs. This way of referring to a nation's moral character shows that it has been long established in evil ways. These cities were notorious for sins of the worst type. These are mentioned in the Bible as sins which bring down the judgments of God upon nations. 1. *The shedding of innocent blood.* (Gen. iv. 10; Job xvi. 18.) This is the highest crime against man. The blood of the innocent appeals to heaven for vengeance. God hears their cry, and by terrible judgments requires their blood of guilty nations. 2. *The peculiar sin of Sodom.* The vilest form of sensuality derives its name from this wicked city. There are sins of the flesh so heinous that they degrade men below the level of the brute. 3. *The oppression of the people of God.* (Ex. iii. 7.) God regards this sin as specially directed against Himself. To fail in duty, or to go wrong, are sins against God; but to afflict His people is directly to affront the Majesty of God. The same principle is to be observed in the case of those who, by the calamities of human life, are in an especial manner thrown upon the care and kindness of God. The oppression of widows and orphans is regarded in Scripture as a crime which calls for immediate judgment, the very tenderness of God urging Him to inflict it. 4. *Withholding the hire of the labourer.* (James v. 4.) Sins committed against society differ much in their consequences to individual men. The labourer who works for day wages suffers a grievous wrong when these are withheld. To rob him of the means by which he lives lies very near to crimes directed against his life. The judgments of God, sooner or later, overtake nations who have a bad eminence in such sins as these.

II. **They are manifestly righteous.** The judgments of God upon sinful communities of men are so conducted that the justice of them may appear. 1. *They proceed slowly.* The feet of vengeance travel with slow and measured steps. Though the punishment may be just in itself, and the sinful deserve no more time, yet it is delayed in order that God's ways with men might appear to be right. When we intend acts of love and kindness, there is a propriety in our haste to do them. But in acts of punishment—of righteous judgment—all haste is unseemly. Mercy will rejoice over judgment as long as it possibly can. God is slow to punish. Judgment is His strange work. He endures even the vessels of wrath with much long-suffering. Men have time to see that the signal examples of Divine retribution which history furnishes are just and right. 2. *They are only inflicted when the reasons of them have been made evident.* God is represented as making careful inquiry. (Verse 21.) Such language is evidently accommodated to our human weakness, but the intent of it is to impress the thought upon our minds, that God will not visit iniquity until it is fully proven. 3. *They are self-vindicating.* Sodom and Gomorrah are represented as crying to God for vengeance. (Verse 20.) There are some sins which more than others loudly call to Heaven for punishment. Their just recompense thus approves itself to the conscience of humanity.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 20. God regards the sins of nations as such, and bears with them until they cry out for vengeance. They put a strain upon the Divine endurance until they become "very grievous," and sparing mercy can hold out no longer.

The sins which destroy nations are those which strike at the very foundations of social order, purity, and safety—lawlessness, corruption in family life, general insecurity amidst the wreck of just institutions. Such sins are among those which "are open beforehand, going before to judgment."

History reads us this awful lesson, that the fall of great nations has been brought about by their own corruptions.

Every sin makes a moral demand for punishment, and has a voice of crimination against the sinner. Sins, however, are more especially said to *cry* when they are peculiarly heinous, flagrant, aggravated, and calculated to provoke the wrath of God; and such were now the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, which two cities are doubtless mentioned for their pre-eminence in crime, though it is clear from Deut. xxix. 22-24 that several other cities in the immediate vicinity were involved in the same destruction.—*(Bush.)*

Because their sin is very grievous. Or, very heavy; such as the very ground groans under; the axle-tree of the earth is ready to break under it. Sin is a burden to God. (Amos ii. 13.) It was so to Christ; He fell to the ground when He was in His agony. It was so to the angels who sank into hell under it. It was so to Korah and his company—the earth could not bear them. It was so to the Sodomites—they were so clogged with this superfluity of naughtiness, as St. James calleth it (chap. i. 21), that God came from heaven to give their land a vomit.—*(Trapp.)*

"*Because* the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and *because* their sin is very grievous." The ways of God are not governed by caprice—the result of mere will. They approve themselves to the reason of mankind.

Verse 21. Every great judgment upon wicked nations is a special visitation of God.

There is a certain measure of sins—a capacity of iniquity—which wicked nations must fill before God's great judgments come upon them.

God is represented as a just judge who has no prepossessions in regard to the case, but is determined to make an exact and careful scrutiny.

The sins of nations require time to develop into a full-grown body, but it is a body prepared for death (James i. 15).

These verses (20, 21), probably, are to be taken as retrospective; as being a parenthetical explanation of the whole scene, which might have been given at the outset, but is now incidentally thrown in: "The Lord had said, I will go down now and see"—speaking after the manner of men, to mark the perfect equity of His procedure, as not condemning hastily, or without inquiry. This had been His purpose in coming down to earth at all on this occasion. In the execution of this purpose, He had visited Abraham. And now, sending on to Sodom the angels who accompanied Him, and who were appointed to save Lot, He Himself remains behind.—(*Candlish.*)

God keeps open the door of repentance to the very last, so that the worst of characters may have no cause to complain of injustice.

Descent here is, of course, but figuratively ascribed to God. There could be no change of place with Him who is everywhere present; nor can examination be necessary to the eye of Omniscience. The language merely represents God as employing those means of investigation which are necessary to man to declare that all the acts of His vengeance are in perfect conformity to justice, and that He never punishes without the clearest reason. And surely, if anything can show unwillingness to punish, or a desire to see everything in the most favourable light, or an anxiety like that of a tender parent to cleave to the last hope that his child is not irrecoverably lost, we have it in these words. It is speaking of God, indeed, according to the manner of men, but it implies that He would look into the whole case; that He would be slow before He came to the resolution to inflict vengeance to the uttermost; that He would institute a careful inquiry, to see whether what He knew to be bad was incurably bad. In a word, it implies that if there was any possibility, consistently with justice, of sparing that devoted city, He stood ready, in heart and mind, to do it. If we rightly apprehend the drift of the whole narrative, verses 20, 21 are inserted by way of parenthesis, in order to acquaint the reader with the main design for which the Lord, with His two accompanying angels, had descended and made this visit to Abraham. On any other interpretation it is not easy to understand the propriety of the expression, verse 21, "I will go down," when He had actually "come down" already.—(*Bush.*)

God's actions, both of mercy and judgment, are proofs of His complete knowledge of men. It is not a blind or irresponsible, but an all-seeing and rational Power that governs the world of nature and of man.

Verse 22. Angels are God's ministers for mercy and for judgment. They are sent forth to deliver the righteous, and to visit judgment upon the wicked.

Abraham stood yet before the Lord. And without such to stand and pray, the world could not stand: they bear up the pillars of it. Oh, the price with God, and profit to men, of praying persons! God will yield something to such when most of all enraged or resolved (Matt. xxiv. 20). Lot was saved for Abraham's sake when all the rest perished.—(*Trapp.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 23-33.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER.

When the angels had departed to go towards Sodom, Abraham was left standing before God (verse 22). He remained to pour forth his soul in prayer for that wicked city whose cry had brought the Lord down from heaven to visit it in judgment. It would have been an example of confidence and courage had he ventured to plead for himself, or for his house; but to plead where he had no personal interest at stake, and where he had no title to interfere—to attempt to stay the uplifted arm of vengeance, this was surely to take an extraordinary liberty, to use the privileges of friendship to the utmost. Abraham will speak out all that is in his soul to God, though he pleads in a desperate cause. Such is the fearlessness of true faith, which is not dismayed even where the aspect is darkest. This prayer of Abraham is the first long prayer recorded in Scripture, and the first example of intercessory prayer. It is the most remarkable human intercession to be found in the pages of the Bible.

I. The right to utter it presupposes a life of godliness. It was a bold stand which Abraham took when he appeared to be more merciful than God Himself, and attempted to arrest a judgment which was so well deserved. This confidence of faith, which speaks out even in the face of all that is discouraging, tells of long friendship with God. The power to prevail much in prayer for others is only the slow growth of time. We cannot ask great favours from God unless we have made sure of our ground by long trial of His goodness in the past. Thus our hope in His mercy to do great things is born of experience. When we have known God long enough there are no favours too large for us to ask. We attain to a faith which even seems to be shameless in its extravagant requests. Abraham was urged to this boldness by long acquaintance with God, who had communicated to him the secrets of His goodness, and now of His judgments. He will take the liberty of fully unburdening his soul to the God of his life, speaking out fearlessly his longing desires, undeterred by any reasons why he should not do so. This is the privilege of a matured piety, to utter our whole desires to God, to fully relieve our souls, to venture the largest hopes in his mercy. *The unselfish character of intercessory prayer* tells us, also, that an advanced stage of the spiritual life has been reached. When a man first believes in God he thinks mostly of himself—of the salvation of his own soul. But when he has known God long, his heart enlarges, and he is concerned for the spiritual interests of others, for the welfare of God's kingdom. Thus the position which Abraham took up as an intercessor was the result, not of a single pious impulse, but rather of a whole life of godliness.

II. It is supported by the thought of the Divine justice. It was justice that the wicked should be visited with punishment—that the penalties of sin should be allowed to take their natural course and fall upon those who commit it. But the justice which Abraham regards was that which would not confound the distinctions between moral good and evil by involving the righteous and the wicked in one common doom. (Verse 23.) He believes that there is an eternal righteousness behind all God's ways which will ultimately appear and manifest itself. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Verse 25.) We can intercede for others with the confident assurance that, however God may deal with them, yet in the end His ways shall be seen to be just and equal. When all human affairs are summed up, and the portions of all men assigned, God's righteousness shall be seen in a clear light. There is a seeming confusion between good and evil in this world: the ways of Providence in their distribution are perplexing; still our heart finds refuge in the sure belief that God will do what shall be seen, in the end, to be right. The end to which all things are working is right and good. It is our deep belief in this ultimate fact that consoles us amidst all the apparent discrepancies of Providence. The thought of a sure righteousness yet to be revealed gives us confidence in prayer for others. We know that the righteous cannot suffer any real harm.

III. It is marked by the spirit of boldness. Abraham's faith was such as could be daunted by no difficulties, and was not afraid to ask great favours. It was a faith which could make large ventures. He pleads for the doomed city with a remarkable boldness of faith. He begins with the supposition that fifty righteous might be found in the city, for whose sake all the guilty inhabitants might be spared. Then he reduces that number, in successive appeals, until he has brought it down to ten. Prudence forbids him to urge his prayer further, and he is content to leave the result with God. 1. *This boldness was based upon the conviction that God would stay judgment upon wicked communities for the sake of the righteous few among them.* Upon each successive petition for the guilty people, God concedes to Abraham the principle that He is ready, in His temporal judgments, to spare the wicked for the sake of the righteous. Abraham knew that the righteous were the salt of the earth. From what we know of the character of God, we are safe in supposing that He sets a high value upon righteousness, and will do much for the sake of those in whom it is manifested. He will favour the good, even though He should have to withhold His hand from inflicting deserved judgment. The thought that God, in the end, will do right, and will not allow goodness to remain under any disadvantage, gives us a warrant for all such intercessory prayers. 2. *This boldness was based upon a sense of the Fatherhood of God.* Abraham uses the language of a free-born son with his Heavenly Father. Without a sense of this filial relationship with God no man could presume so much. Were God *only* a king, His subjects would be under the obligation to render unquestioning obedience. They would have the right of petition, but could only employ it in servile fear, or with a cold reverence. Everything like affectionate and confident pleading would be impossible. But Abraham feels that he is a son at home with his Father, and can say all that is in his heart. Without this feeling of sonship there cannot be this confidence of love in pleading with God. God has a Son who can approach Him intimately and with all-prevailing power, and He has now the same privileges for all His brethren. The prayer of the righteous is an appeal to a Father's heart. 3. *This boldness is tempered by humility.* Abraham speaks as one who can hardly realise his right to speak at all. (Verse 27.) He remembers what he is in the sight of his Creator. He does not forget what is due to the greatness and majesty of God. Our high privilege does not destroy the reasons for awe and reverence.

IV. We must recognise the fact that it has proper limits. Abraham commenced his prayer by pleading for fifty righteous who might possibly be found in the city. He still continues to plead, until he has reduced the number to ten, and still has a favourable response. Why should he not continue to urge his prayer, and make bold enough to ask God to spare the guilty people for the sake of *five* righteous. But he is satisfied with the tokens of God's favour already granted. He feels that Sodom will be spared unless that exercise of the Divine clemency should be a moral impossibility. He will not press God to a denial by using the liberty of petition to the utmost. He is now willing to leave the result with God. Thus even our benevolent feelings must not carry us so far as to violate the proprieties of our relations with God. There is a proper limit to intercessory prayer. 1. *The moral limits of the Divine clemency.* The long-suffering and forbearance of God may be tempted too far. 2. *By a sense of what is due to the Divine honour.* The dignity of God's character and government must be upheld. 3. *By our recognition of the Divine sovereignty.* God rules all things supremely by a righteous will. We must not attempt to dictate ultimate courses to Him, but learn to trust His righteousness. It is not given to us to adjust the exact proportions of justice and mercy in God's dealings with mankind. To attempt this would be presumption. 4. *By the confidence which we ought to have in the Divine character.* Abraham felt that he had no need to go further. He had seen enough already of God's favour and willingness to save. Therefore he might hope and trust for the future. We have sufficient experience of God's goodness in the past to teach us that we should leave all results with Him. As the children of God we are allowed an affectionate liberty in prayer; but though our Heavenly Father yields us the privileges of sons, yet as Lord of all He retains a majesty. Though encouraged by His love we must ever remember what is due to His greatness.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 23. Prayer implies: 1. Drawing near unto God. (Heb. x. 22, James iv. 8.) 2. A holy fervency of soul, that feeling which arises from the thought that God is near. 3. Importunity. While we have an audience with God, and the time is favourable, we must not allow the opportunity to slip, but urge our request until we prevail. 4. Strong desires which impel us to utter them before God. Abraham spoke to God.

It is the privilege only of those who have a knowledge of God's ways to draw nigh unto Him. "The hypocrite shalt not come before Him" (Job. xiii. 16.)

Prayer should not be a mere wish, but should be urged upon a reasonable ground. God graciously allows men to reason with Him concerning His judgments. (Jer. xii. 1.)

The question here proposed is not to be understood as implying any settled doubt in the mind of Abraham whether the righteous might not be in danger of being destroyed with the wicked. His previous knowledge of the true attributes of Jehovah would have precluded any apprehension on this score; and yet there might have been a momentary inward misgiving which was sufficient to prompt the humble and reverential inquiry of the text. As a general principle, we run no hazard in maintaining that in the distribution of rewards and punishments the Judge of all the earth will do right. At the same time it cannot be questioned that in those judgments which befall communities in the ordinary course of God's providence the good and the bad are often alike involved. Thus the calamities of war, earthquake, fire, etc., fall upon the righteous as well as the wicked. In such cases we are to look forward to the retributions of another world for a complete vindication of the ways of Providence. But we may suppose that Abraham here speaks rather of such miraculous and extraordinary judgments as are immediately inflicted by the hand of God for the punishment of some crying sins, and as a warning to a heedless world to avoid the like provocations. Such was the awful visitation which God now intended to bring upon Sodom, and to which Abraham refers. In this case it might reasonably be expected from the justice of God that He would put a difference between the righteous and the wicked. Similar to this was the prayer of Moses and Aaron. (Num. xvi. 19-22.) And on this occasion an exemption was granted to all such as would avail themselves of it. (Ver. 26.) Compare 2 Sam. xxiv. 17; Psalms xi. 4-7.—(*Bush.*)

Saints may be charitable to sinners whom God threatens with His judgments.

The righteous, after all, whatever may come upon the wicked, and however they may suffer along with them for a season, are safe in the end. It is not for their sakes chiefly, that delay of the threatened doom, and a lengthened season of forbearance, are chiefly to be sought. At any rate, Abraham's petition goes far beyond the mere exemption of the righteous from temporary suffering and trial. This might have been accomplished in another way than that which he points out—as ultimately it was accomplished by the deliverance of Lot. Such a manner, however, of saving the righteous from the evil to come, does not occur to Abraham. Not even when, in the progress of his singular expostulation, he assumes, at every stage, a more desperate case—not even then does this enter into his mind as a last resource—a final alternative. He does not so much as put it forward as a forlorn hope. To the last, he is bent upon the intercepting of the judgment altogether—the sparing of the guilty thousands, in consideration of the ten righteous men who may be found among them.—(*Candlish.*)

Verse 24. God's own servants, even, cannot reckon up the righteous and mark them definitely. Prayer cannot always be urged upon a certain knowledge of facts as to the objects of it, but must be uttered in the spirit of a broad charity.

In the midst of the worst appearances, it is safe to indulge a hope that some truth and righteousness may be found.

He who observes the world of mankind must see the tremendous power of evil; but he is happy if this does not lead him to lose faith in the great power of goodness.

It is possible that righteousness may thrive, even under the greatest disadvantages.

Charity presumes the best, hopes the best. The disciples could not imagine that Judas was so very a traitor: each one suspects himself sooner than him. And when our Saviour said, "What thou doest, do quickly," they thought He had meant of making provision, or giving something to the poor (St. John xiii. 27-29). —*Trapp.*

Abraham has got hold of that grand principle of the moral administration of God as applicable to this fallen, but not irrecoverably fallen world, that the righteous "are the salt of the earth"—that "the kingdom of heaven is like to a little leaven which a woman hid in a bushel of meal till the whole was leavened"—"that it is like a grain of mustard seed, which grows till it becomes the greatest of trees." He has learned the lesson which the parable of the tares was intended to teach. So long as God may have a single stalk of wheat in the field, which might be lost and confounded among the tares in their premature destruction—so long as He may have a single little one not yet gathered unto Himself from among the crowd of the ungodly—so long as the mass is not so hopelessly corrupt and putrid but that the savour of one man's holy zeal and love may yet keep some portion of it from decay—so long God will spare the most abandoned city, and will not sweep the earth with His besom of destruction.—*(Candlish.)*

Verse 25. In the great moral perplexities of Providence it is right for us to fall back upon those qualities in God which are His very nature and essence.

We may be sure that in the government of the world God will do nothing that will confound the distinctions of moral good and evil. The righteous, in the long run, shall not lie under any disadvantage, and the wicked shall not go unpunished.

It is our greatest consolation, amidst all perplexities in the ways of God, that right will be done at last to all interests and to all persons. There will be a final adjustment of all discrepancies, so that all who are just and true shall be satisfied.

Verse 26. God concedes to Abraham the principle of his petition—grants the prayer on the grounds on which it was presented, even to the full measure of the desire of His servant.

God's encouragements to our prayers lead us to ask for more.

God is willing to spare the worst communities for the sake of the few righteous therein. 1. This truth is humiliating to the enemies of religion. They may think themselves secure and happy while they have outward prosperity, when the real truth is that they have been spared beyond their time and the good things of Providence continued to them, only because of the few righteous among them, whom they despise. This thought must be humiliating when it is brought home to them, as it must be. 2. This truth is encouraging to the friends of religion. They have the pleasing reflection that the power and advantage of their righteousness extends beyond themselves, and mitigates the evils of the world. 3. This truth furnishes an important lesson to civil governments. Let them have respect to those who live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world. Let them beware of persecuting the people of God. All nations who have done so have come to nought. History shows that God is on the side of righteousness.

How many can say, on behalf of a wicked nation, Except the Lord of Hosts had left us a remnant of righteous men, we might long ago have been as Sodom, and made like unto Gomorrah!

The influence of righteousness to stay the consequences of sin upon a guilty world is one reason why the good are not taken from this scene of trial when their title to heaven is clear.

Verse 27. They who stand nearest to God are the most humble. The angels which the prophet saw in the Temple covered their faces with two wings. (Isa. vi. 2.)

The boldness of prayer must ever be tempered with humility. We must remember where we are, on what ground we stand, and with whom we have to do.

The very liberty of an audience with God in prayer is a matter for wondering gratitude.

The origin and destiny of our material frame is a thought that should make us humble, but still one which should not overcome us altogether. *That*, too, is the work of God, and He has respect unto it. He will not forsake the work of His own hands.

Verses 28 and 29. He will name five less than the requisite number; fearing that possibly the salvation might fail by the number falling short of fifty. How he puts the plea! *For lack of five!* Not naming forty-five, but making it as though when God had conceded so much, that now to refuse for *lack of five*, would be quite inconceivable. The answer is equally favourable.—(*Jacobus.*)

Gracious answers to our prayers encourage us to ask for more.

Verse 30. He takes a bolder step, reducing the number by *ten* instead of by *five*. He enlarges his petition, and yet he proceeds with a wholesome fear. The greater the privilege to which we are admitted the more should we learn to rejoice with trembling.

Even the boldness permitted in prayer should be tempered by a fear lest we should incur God's anger for our rash and inconsiderate demands.

It is a noble zeal by which Abraham runs the risk of offending God for the sake of others. This is like St. Paul's wish that he might be "anathema" for the sake of his brethren.

Verse 31. In the greatest encouragements to prayer, the thought who we are, and who God is, should ever be present with us.

Verse 32. He makes another and final advance in his plea. It is now for *ten's* sake. And he receives the same prompt and favouring response. Why should not the successful pleader—the friend of God, who had not yet been at all denied—go on and still further plead for *five's* sake? He is satisfied to rest his petition there. He is satisfied with this exhibition of the Divine favour, and is willing to trust the result with God, who has clearly shown His willingness to save, so that now he cannot doubt that Sodom will be spared if it be possible. Peradventure, also, the case may be such as to forbid the Divine clemency to go further (Ex. xiv. 14; Jer. xv. 1). He will not press God to a denial, nor limit His sovereignty, nor press Him thus to the smallest figure. Here he can rest the cause and trust. "This seemingly commercial kind of entreaty," says *Delitzsch*, "is the essence of true prayer. It is the shamelessness of faith which bridges over the infinite distance of the creature from the Creator, and appeals with importunity to the heart of God, not ceasing till the point is gained." Yet we may go beyond all proper bound to require a positive limitation of God's freedom, or to demand that He commit Himself to the smallest possible figure in such cases, as if we could not rest the issue in His hands even for the last fraction, but must bind Him to us else we cannot rest.—(*Jacobus.*)

When we have pleaded with God for others, to the furthest limits of intercession, though our request may not be granted in the form which we desired, we still have satisfactions. 1. That God's ways are righteous. We may be sure that He will do what is best and most fitted to secure the universal good. 2. That our request shall be granted, even to our utmost wish, if it is within the limits of moral possibility. 3. That we have discharged our own conscience and unburdened our soul. We have the satisfaction that we have performed a duty which lay heavy on our hearts. 4. That even if we have erred in our too great boldness, we may hope that the promptings of a benevolent heart will be graciously forgiven.

Our prayers ultimately bring our souls to the true position of repose, in which we are resigned to the will of God. And there every child of God should leave the whole matter. The Head of our race has herein left us an example and a doctrine. "Father, if it be possible, let the cup pass. Nevertheless, Father, not my will, but Thine be done."

Verse 33. We leave off asking before God leaves off granting.

Sodom was not spared in answer to Abraham's prayers, yet the *principle* upon which he urged his petition was granted. It is comforting to know that our prayer has been presented upon proper grounds, and that we have done according to truth, even when the thing prayed for is denied.

God listens to us when we pray in faith, and graciously leans towards us; but still He will take His way. He will go on to work out His vast designs.

God granted Abraham's prayer so far as he ventured to extend it. "All the way from fifty to ten?" He answered, "*Yes;* I will spare for the number that you name." We know not what would have been the answer had he gone further. He may have had some intimation that he should proceed no further (Jer. vii. 16; xi. 14), or by the Covenant Angel going his way. But (1) we have here the highest encouragement for intercessory prayer—to plead with God for wicked men, for communities and nations that are far gone in sin. Guilty cities and nations have been spared on account of God's people (Matt. v. 13; xxiv. 22). Abraham received no denial. So far as we can see, it was he who left off, and not God. Yet (2) we are to rest humbly and trustfully upon God's good pleasure after all our prayer. It would seem that there were not even so many as ten righteous in Sodom. And yet God went even further than His promise, and saved Lot's family, which contained, doubtless, all the righteous who were there. Thus He granted Abraham's prayer. He would not destroy the righteous with the wicked. (3) God loves to be pleaded with and importuned in prayer. (4) The righteous are the salt of the earth. The world is preserved in being for the Church's sake. The history of the world is the history of redemption. (5) We have still higher encouragement to pray and plead for the ONE RIGHTEOUS' sake—JESUS. Six times he, Abraham, urged his prayer, with a steady advance, and each time made God's gracious answer the encouragement to ask yet more. And there he rested in a serene, Sabbatic confidence in God, that He would do all things right and well. "Not my will, but Thine be done." (6) What a blessing to have the prayers of a saint for us.—*(Jacobus.)*

It is well that this renowned example of faith should also be equally remarkable for his power in intercessory prayer. His was not that narrow piety by which a man only seeks the salvation of his own soul, and cares little for aught else so long as he himself is safe. But it was that devotion to the good of others, that broad charity which every soul must have who has tasted of the lovingkindness of God.

CHAPTER XIX.

Critical Notes.—**1. And there came two angels to Sodom at even.]** *Heb. And there came two of the angels.* The third remained with Abraham, being held by him in his pleadings for Sodom. (Ch. xviii. 22, 33.) *Sat in the gate.* The usual place for public gatherings, and for the judges to sit in court. (Job xxvii. 7-12.) The Jewish commentators understand this phrase as implying the exercise of the authority and office of a magistrate. Possibly Lot might have occupied such a position. He was an aged man, and the elders of the city used to assume this office without any formalities. (See ver. 9.) *Rose up to meet them; and bowed himself with his face towards the ground.* It was the Oriental custom to rise up in the presence of superiors, and to pay them homage by bowing low with the face towards the ground. **2. My lords.]** "The word is the same as that by which Abraham addressed God (ch. xviii. 3) in the singular, but it is differently pointed in the Hebrew, and evidently must be differently understood, as the sentence is in the second person plural, not singular, as there. And accordingly, while the Masoretic editors have a note against Adonai there, '*sacred*,' meaning that it is the name of God, here they note the '*profane*,' meaning that it is the name of man only." *(Alford.) And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. Heb. Because we will lodge in the open square;* i.e., the wide place in the gate. **3. And he pressed upon them greatly.]** The Heb. word implies an earnestness of importunity amounting almost to violence. The same word is used in ver. 9, "And they *pressed sore* upon the man." *A feast.* Heb. *A banquet.* "It was a refreshment, whether called an eating or a drinking. In Esther v. 6, 7, it is rendered a banquet of wine. This was Lot's generous entertainment—the best at his command, doubtless." *(Jacobus.) Unleavened bread.* Because this kind could be more expeditiously prepared. **5. That we may know them.]** A well-known euphemism for a foul crime which derives its name from this infamous place. "From Levit. xxii.-xxv. we learn that the practice of the sin here contemplated was among the principal causes why God exterminated the Canaanitish nations." *(Alford.)* This sin was also the curse of heathenism, even in the best days of Rome. (Rom. i. 22.) **5. And they called unto Lot.]** "That is, with a loud voice; demanded vociferously; which was virtually *proclaiming* their own shame. In allusion to the circumstance mentioned in this verse, the prophet says of Jerusalem, Isa. iii. 9: 'They *declare* their sin as Sodom, they hide it not.' Compare the similar instance of enormous wickedness recorded, Jud. xix. 22, etc." *(Bush.)* **6. And Lot went out at the door.]** "The original here, as in ver. 11, employs two distinct words for 'door;' the one signifying the aperture, passage, or doorway, through which ingress and egress were made; the other denoting the 'leaf' of the door, hung upon hinges, by which the aperture was closed. The distinction is very accurately preserved throughout the subsequent narrative, ver. 9-11." *(Bush.)* **9. He will needs be a judge.]** *Heb. He will judge to judge.* "*He continually acteth as judge.*" "It is recorded of Lot in the N.T. that he was greatly and constantly worried and worn down by their gross outrages, and probably he had often rebuked them." (2 Pet. ii. 7, 8.) *(Jacobus.)* **11. Blindness.]** Onk. *Fatuity of sight.* "Mental blindness, in which the eye sees, but does not see the right object." *(Keil.)* The original word occurs only here and in 2 Kings xvi. 18. "The judgment consisted not in a total privation of sight, in which case they would, of course, have desisted from their assault on Lot, and endeavoured to make their way home, but in a confused vision, such as is occasioned by vertigo of the brain, in which objects swim before the eyes, and mock every attempt to approach or seize them." *(Bush.)* **12. Son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters.]** "The mention of the son-in-law before the sons and daughters is somewhat surprising. *Lange* has proposed to read thus: 'Hast thou here any besides as son-in-law?' (*i.e.*, connected with thee by marriage), and then follows the mention of the members of Lot's own family. And this would certainly be a more probable arrangement." *(Alford.)* **13. The cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord.]** *Heb. Is become great before Jehovah.* **14. Spake unto his sons-in-law.]** "Some hold these to have been only betrothed to his two daughters before mentioned: and so the Vulgate renders *His sons-in-law, who were about to receive his daughters.* So also Josephus, and of the moderns, Kalisch, Keil, Lange, Ewald, etc. On the other hand, the LXX. keeps the past tense, and is followed by Rosenmuller, Knobel, and Delitzsch. Certainly, in ver. 15, the '*two daughters which are here*' seem to be distinguished from other daughters who were absent. On the whole, the more probable view seems that there were husbands of married daughters living in the city, whereas his two virgin daughters lived with their father at home." *(Alford.)* **15. When the morning arose]** The day-dawn; for the sun did not rise till Lot entered Zoar (ver. 23). "The Heb. root signifies splitting or breaking, the streaks of light breaking up the eastern clouds; and it '*arose*,' because the dawn advances from the horizon upwards." *Thy two daughters which are here. Heb.* "Which are found." Chal. "Which are found faithful with thee." Seems to imply that some of Lot's daughters were not thus found, and therefore perished in the destruction of the city. *In the iniquity of the city.* The Heb. term signifies either the iniquity or the *punishment* of the iniquity. **16. While he lingered.]** *Heb.* "He delayed or distracted himself." "The original is peculiar and emphatic in its import, leading us to fear that it was not *altogether* a compassionate sympathy that detained his steps. The word properly implies that 'he suffered himself to be hindered and embarrassed with distracting cares.'" *(Bush.)* *The Lord being merciful unto him.* Heb. "In the gentle mercy of the Lord upon him." 17. The plain.] The country round Jordan—the same word as that used in ch. xiii. 10. *The mountain.* The mountainous region of Moab, lying several miles to the east of Sodom. 19. Lest some evil take me.] *Heb.* "Lest the evil, or, this evil"—the threatened destruction. 20. It is a little one.] Formerly known by the name of "Bela" (Gen. xiv. 2), now called Zoar from this circumstance. The Jerus. Targ. reads: "It is little, and its sins are little." 25. Those cities.] Besides Sodom and Gomorrah, other cities were involved in this destruction, the cities of Admah and Zeboim (Deut. xxix. 23; Hos. xi. 8), and all in the valley of Siddim, Zoar alone being excepted. 26. Pillar of salt.] *Heb.* "And she was a (statue or) column of salt." This pillar is spoken of in the Book of Wisdom as still standing at that time. (Wisdom x. 7.) Josephus, the early Fathers of the Church, and even some modern travellers have asserted that it was well known in their days. "We may observe, in the spirit of Mr. Grove's article, 'Lot,' in the *Biblical Dict.*, that no details are given us here at all furnishing a foundation for the legends and tales of travellers which have been built upon the history." *(Alford.)* 37. Called his name Moab.] *"From the father,"* or *"seed of the father."* 38. Ben-Ammi. *"Son of my people."*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-3.

THE EVE OF JUDGMENT TO THE RIGHTEOUS.

This visitation of God's vengeance upon the wicked cities of the plain is typical of the Last Judgment upon mankind; and the conduct of Lot declares to us something of the behaviour of the righteous under the immediate shadow of that judgment.

I. The righteous man is found in the way of duty. 1. *The duty of his calling.* When the two angels came to Sodom at even, Lot was found sitting at the gate, which was the place for news and business. He was, probably, there in the capacity of a judge, (Verse 9.) He was in the way of his ordinary duty to which Providence had called him. He was found at his post. So it shall be in the end of the world. Good men will be found walking in the humble ways of duty at the coming of the Lord. They are not to stand still gazing into heaven, and indifferent to all things around them, but to perform the tasks of their appointed day until the night cometh. The Lord expects, when He cometh to judge His servants, to find them carrying out the commands which He left with them. 2. *The duty arising from the relations of human life.* Lot treats these strangers with kindness and hospitality. (Verses 2, 3.) He even presses his favours upon them. There were special duties owing to the stranger, and he discharges them willingly from the best and purest motives. There are duties arising from our relations to society, duties which exercise us in the tender charities of human life. Up to the very eve of judgment the righteous will be found doing the deeds of love and kindness. (Matt. xxv. 35-41.)

II. The righteous man is separate from sinners. Lot was not engaged in the wicked practices of the place. He separated himself from the vile sinners of the city—kept up the dignity of his character as a righteous man. It would have been better for him had he not lived amongst this wicked people; but now he had to accept the fact, and strive to separate himself from them in spirit, aim, and purpose. The righteous are in the world, and they maintain their godly life not by seeking seclusion from it, but by living above it, by cherishing a nobler purpose, and acting out the Divine idea of life. They are unworldly just as Christ was unworldly, mingling with men, and yet living the life of heaven upon earth; discharging common duties, and yet attending to the work of His high calling. This separateness, which is necessarily the mark of the righteous character, involves: 1. *Sorrow for the spiritual state of men alienated from God.* Lot was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked, and in seeing and hearing day by day deeds of sin and lawlessness. (2 Pet. ii. 7, 8.) It is one of the sorrows of the godly man that his spiritual sensibilities are wounded by the observation of sin around him. He feels pity for those who are in so sad a case, so infatuated and exposed to the danger of judgment; and yet his pity often acquires the temper of a righteous indignation that his God is so dishonoured. 2. *A principle which regulates choice of companionship.* A godly man will choose for intimate companionship those who are like-minded with himself, and who will further his spiritual interests. He avoids the contagion of evil example, and in the choice of his companions strives ever "to seek those beings which are above." He is constantly attracted to that which is most godlike. Though Lot followed it so feebly, yet such was the *direction* in which he set his righteous soul. He is pleased with the company of those whom he felt to be kindred spirits. He offers them hospitality, and treats them with every consideration and courtesy. So it shall be when the last Judgment is about to come upon the world. The righteous will still be a separate people, sharing a common feeling and interest.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Another instance where, under the form of ordinary hospitality, angels are entertained unawares.

A godly training must refine and polish the manners. The continual practice of the duties of religion tends to destroy the love of self, and to foster that consideration for others which is the soul of good behaviour in the intercourse of life. The righteous man does that from principle and real convictions which the man of the world does from a cold regard to artificial standards of duty and courtesy.

Superior beings inspire respect in those whose souls are open to impressions made by what is great and good. The worship of One who is supremely good, generates a regard for goodness wherever it may be found.

There is a humility and reverence due to the pious, for these are but angels in disguise. Such honour must be awarded to the saints, if we consider what they shall be in the great possibilities of the future.

When the two angels came to Sodom at even, Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. He was at his post, and on the watch, not forgetful to entertain strangers. This was pre-eminently the office of pious love which he had to discharge. As Abraham, at noon-day, ere he sat down to his meal—so Lot, at night, ere he retired to rest, remained on the look-out for those who might need his hospitality. Especially, if any of the remnant of God's people, persecuted by the idolatrous nations, and compelled to wander on the wide earth, without a home, should be passing through the accursed city where Lot dwelt, it was indeed a most essential service to intecept them at the gate, to prevent them from falling into the hands of the unprincipled and lawless crowd, whose companions or whose victims it was alike fatal to become, and to give them the shelter of a roof beneath which the Lord was worshipped. Thus was Lot employed, when all the rest of the city were probably either sunk in slumber or abandoned to riot. Had he been asleep, like the others, or had he been indulging in vain and sinful dissipation, he might have missed the visit of the friendly angels; they might have passed by his house.—*(Candlish.)*

Verse 2. Kindred natures assort easily together.

These minute attentions to the wants of travellers were among the hospitalities practised by all Oriental nations. But the inhabitants of these wicked cities had fallen far below these common standards of duty.

They would have determined to abide in the street all night but for Lot's importunity. So our Saviour would have gone further but that the two disciples constrained Him to stay. (Luke xxiv. 29.) This was no simulation; or, if so, yet it was only explanatory, without deceit or hypocrisy. And if Solomon sinned not in making believe he would do that which was unlawful to be done (1 Kings iii. 24), it can be no sin to do the like in things indifferent.—(*Trapp.*)

Lot is approved of the Lord as righteous, and exempt from the doom of the city. Therefore the messengers of God can dwell with him.

We should seek opportunities to do good, and even press our favours upon others.

Verse 3. He pressed them, not merely from an impulse of generosity that he might refresh them with the cheer of his house, or from a wish to enjoy their company and converse, but because he was too well aware of the danger to which they would be exposed were they to adhere to their declared purpose of lodging in the street.—(*Bush.*)

There may be honest feasting in Lot's house among the riot and gluttony of the Sodomites.—(*Hughes.*)

Love, like authority, has its constraints. As there is a violence of wickedness, so there is a holy violence which will take no denial.

To Lot's petition the reply is, "Nay, but we will abide in the street all night." Eventually, indeed, they yield to his importunity, and he sups with them and they with him. But whereas in Abraham's case communion is reached, as it were, naturally without an effort, in Lot's there is a struggle of prayer before his desire is granted. By the self-mortified pilgrim communion is easily obtained. Those who live in the world, judging it rather than themselves, though they would gladly welcome the Lord or His servants, find that before communion can be enjoyed a temporary denial and a spiritual struggle must be experienced.—(*Jukes: "Types of Genesis."*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 4-11.

THE EVE OF JUDGMENT TO SINNERS.

The conduct of the men of Sodom, who were so near their doom, is an example of that kind of conduct which the wicked among mankind will still show when the last Judgment draws nigh.

I. Their wickedness is unabated. Time had brought no change for the better with this wicked people. They rather grew worse and worse, descending to the lowest depths of sin and vice. The last days of the world may be days of light and of widely diffused knowledge, yet they will not reveal an universal moral improvement amongst mankind. We are taught in Scripture to expect that these will be perilous times when lawlessness will prevail and iniquity abound. The tares will stand until the harvest shall be reaped. We may note the features of the wickedness recorded here, and they are types of the state of a large portion of human society when the end shall come. 1. *It extends to all classes of the community.* "The men of Sodom compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people, from every quarter." (Verse 4.) All classes and all ages were infected by the prevailing vices and sins. With the exception of righteous Lot and his family none escaped from the mire and sink of the greatest pollutions. The saddest fact of all, the "young," too, had imbibed evil principles, and were corrupted in their ways. When the contagion of vice so fastens upon the youth of a nation the swiftest judgments may be expected. 2. *It includes the most shameful sins.* The men of Sodom desired Lot to give up the strangers sheltered under his roof to their vile lusts. The sin in which they had so bad an eminence derives its very name from this infamous place. They do not seek to hide their sin, but openly avow their love of deeds against the use of nature. It is sad to reflect that men in their vile passions are capable of descending below the level of the brutes. Even the refining influences of civilisation do not suffice to root out some degrading forms of vice, for this unnatural practice prevailed during the best days of Rome. The penal codes of nations still show that this shameful crime has not perished from the earth. How true the Bible is to the facts of human nature, degrading though they be! 3. *It opposes the righteous to the last.* Lot could not entertain these strangers without making his house a mark for the assaults of these wicked men. They scrupled not to use open violence against him. (Verse 9.) There must ever be an antagonism between the spirit of the world and that which is of God, and to the end this will bear sad fruit in the persecution of the good. To the last the righteous will suffer at the hands of evil men.

II. **They expose themselves to inflictions which foreshadow future judgments.** These men were stricken with blindness; a blindness which not only confused the vision but also the mind with insane delusions. This was a more awful visitation than the mere deprivation of sight. Moral blindness and madness prepare the way for the extreme retribution. Sinners will be the victims of such moral infatuation till the end of time. These men, though stricken by such an awful calamity, yet desisted not in their wickedness, but "wearied themselves to find the door." Sinners to the latest times will still engage in the insane endeavour to continue the war against Omnipotence. Moral blindness is a punishment—an act of judgment. God has determined that those who *will* not see *shall* not see. Those who refuse to believe shall, in the end, not be able to believe. (John xii. 38-40.) Powers disused are taken away, as in the case of him who hid his talent in the earth. Judgment has already begun with those whose souls are seized with infatuation. When Christ comes for judgment He will find men acting as distracted persons, full of mirth and jollity, though destruction is around them and they are so close upon their doom. (Matt. xxiv. 37-39.)

III. **Their conduct often becomes a source of dangerous perplexity to the righteous.** These vile sinners made a shameful demand of Lot (verse 5). He refused to yield to them, because he would not be a party to so foul a crime and he must not betray the rights of hospitality. It was a point of honour, in Oriental countries, to defend at all costs the stranger who was received into the house. In his perplexity, Lot made a desperate suggestion (verse 8). He violated one duty to maintain another. The conflict of duties into which he was forced by this situation disturbed his moral sense. He was like a man bewildered, who is ready to receive any solution of his difficulty. The complication of events led him into temptation and a snare. The awful wickedness of the world often places godly men in circumstances of great perplexity and danger to their souls. So it will be in the end of the world. Because of abounding iniquity the love of many shall wax cold. It would seem that even the very elect shall run the risk of deception. The immense power of evil which is in the world will try the righteous to the last. The severity of the trial is admitted, and yet in the worst possible case a man's duty is still clear. He should do the right, and put his trust in God. It is ours to obey, even in the face of most enormous difficulties, and to leave the consequences with Him. Faith shows a sure way out of the utmost perplexity.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 4. There are sufficient reasons to justify those terrible acts of Divine vengeance which are recorded in sacred history.

How easily sin is roused to action. The baseness of these wicked neighbours soon betrays itself!

The utter corruption of youth is

the last stage in the degeneration of a people. This is the most fatal spot on the social body, showing that mortification has already set in.

The kind offices which Lot was about to perform for these strangers was not an easy exercise of godly charity, or one implying little personal risk. He made his house a mark for the assaults of those men of Belial, who could scarce endure that so godly a man should dwell among them, far less that he should reprove or restrain their sins. That fearful night tried both them and Lot. "The wicked plot against the just." Doubtless they have an old grudge to satisfy. And now they seize the opportunity of at once indulging their passions, and wreaking their vengeance on one whose faithful testimony and consistent life they have found to be an intolerable offence and provocation.—*(Candlish.)*

The signal had but to be given, and the universal mass of the population were ready at once to flock together to any scene of riot and debauchery. Had they had any useful occupation to follow, were they not completely sunk in profligate idleness, they could not all have found time thus suddenly to rendezvous for deeds of iniquity. But from the peculiar emphasis of the language it would seem that there were no exceptions. Sodom was full of Sodomites. What must have been the extent of its abominations, when the aged, instead of restraining the young, were actually urging them forward in the course of iniquity by their own pernicious example!—(*Bush.*)

How often it has happened that houses where the voice of prayer and praise was heard have been the mark for the assaults of wicked men, while the abodes of vice and blasphemy have remained unmolested. Such is that hatred of goodness, which is found in the natural heart!

Verse 5. **There is a maturity of corruption in which wicked men are not ashamed to proclaim their sin.**

There are sins which in a special manner sully the honour of human nature, put men beyond the pale of common regard, and tend to destroy a people from among the family of nations.

Verse 6. **It is a duty of religion to protect those whom Providence has thrown in our way and given into our care.**

Lot shut the door behind him for the purpose of protecting his guests, We put ourselves best in the way of a favourable Providence when we use all reasonable means.

The conduct of Lot in going out and expostulating with them, was in several respects praiseworthy. His "shutting the door after him," expressed how delicately he felt for his guests, though at present he does not appear to have considered them in any other light than strangers. It was saying in effect, "Let not their ears be offended with what passes abroad; whatever is scurrilous, obscene, or abusive, let me hear it, but not them." —(*Fuller.*)

Verse 7. **It is the duty of good men to dissuade the wicked from sin.**

When we cannot by our precept or example turn men entirely from the power of Satan unto God, we must not be indifferent to lesser reforms in their character. It is something if we are able to save them from the grossest sins; for they are then better prepared to listen to the wisdom of the just, and to learn righteousness.

A certain respectful behaviour is due even to the vilest sinners. Even in their lowest degradation we must recognise their humanity.

Lot's gentle and respectful manner of treating this worst of mobs is worthy of notice. Though he could have entertained no respect for them on the score of character, yet he forbore the use of opprobrious terms. Recognising in them his fellow-creatures and near neighbours, he calls them *brethren*, if perchance by such conciliatory language he may gain their ear, and eventually dissuade them from their wicked purpose.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 8. It is difficult to give an account of this offer consistently with any estimate of Lot as a "righteous man." But in our estimating we must remember that the same offer was made and the thing actually done in the parallel case at Gibeah of Benjamin (Judges xix. 24.) Guided by that other case, we cannot, as some have done, suppose that Lot had any end in view beyond that which the proposal declares, or that it was due to his perturbation of mind, as Augustine sugests. He seems simply to have had in view the averting of a fearful crime (enhanced in this case by its violating the sacred rights of hospitality) by the permission of another crime, the very thought of which we happily in these Christian days cannot find place for in a father's heart.—(*Alford.*)

When, to turn off their attention from his guests, he proposes to bring out and surrender his daughters to their pleasure, he hints at an expedient which can by no means be justified. It is not for us to have recourse to one evil in the hope of preventing a greater; but rather to consent to no evil. His regard to the rites of hospitality was indeed commendable; but having used all proper means of preserving his guests, he ought to have left the event to God. It is possible, indeed, that owing to the excessive perturbation of his mind he was scarcely master of his words or actions, and that some excuse may be suggested for him on this score; but in all probability if he had never lived in Sodom, nor become familiarised to their profligate manners, he would not have made such a proposal. As it was, he evidently gained nothing by it but an increased measure of abuse. Persuasion has no force with men who are under the dominion of their lusts, and nothing is more common than for kind admonitions and faithful rebukes to be attributed to unmannerly and arrogant dictation. So Lot's endeavours to restrain these desperate Sodomites from the commission of iniquity was taken in evil part; their resentment was inflamed against him; they thirsted for revenge, and not content with having the men brought out, they will go in unto them, and break the door open to effect their purpose! —(*Bush.*)

A polluted moral atmosphere is dangerous to the most vigorous righteous character. The whole tone of the spiritual life may become lowered, the conception of duty debased. (1 Cor. xv. 33.)

Evil examples around affect righteous souls, as it were, inductively. The bad influence is felt, and souls are injured even when they have avoided contact.

Strong faith teaches a man to do the right, even in the most perplexing situations. Results may be safely left with God, who knows how to deliver the godly in the time of temptation.

Verse 9. This seems to be a menace to frighten Lot out of the way of their perverse will. It is probable, indeed, that he and his family would not have been so long safe in this wicked place had he not been the occasion of a great deliverance to the whole city when they were carried away by the four kings. The threat is followed by a taunt when the sorely vexed host hesitated to give up the strangers. *He will needs be a judge.* It is evident Lot had been in the habit of remonstrating with them. From threats and taunts they soon proceed to violence.—(*Murphy.*)

Majorities do not always determine what is right and just. Lot was one against many. The people of Sodom thought that numbers was some justification of their cause, and they derided the opinion of an individual.

The wisdom of the stranger is not to be scorned because he is such. Many nations have risen in the scale of civilisation and become great by giving heed to words of truth and righteousness which have been brought to them by strangers.

How unseasonable are the reproaches of the wicked! Ten such strangers would have saved Sodom!

Verse 10. God's people are safe when angels stand sentries at their doors. Moses again calls the heavenly messengers by a name indicative, not of what they *were*, but of what they *seemed;* for, although they now began to put forth a superhuman power, they had not yet revealed themselves as ministers sent from heaven. The incident here related of them teaches us that though God, in His deep wisdom, often sees fit to defer, till His people are brought into the most trying straits, the aid which He purposes to afford, yet He will not fail them in the last extremity. Lot was made to feel his extremity before the needed succour was vouchsafed him; but as he had kindly and generously opened his doors for the reception of God's messengers; as he had recognised a special providence in their being sent within the sphere of his hospitality; and as he had exposed himself to great perils in their defence, the Most High would not leave him without a witness of His guardian care. By this seasonable interference He reminds us how calmly we may resign ourselves to the custody of an ever-watchful Providence while engaged in the way of duty, and how intrepidly we may face dangers and enemies while following that "which right is."—*(Bush.)*

Lot is saved by those for whose protection he had ventured all. Thus, often before we look for it, loving deeds bring their own reward.

The righteous discover the hand of God in their deliverance.

Verse 11. *Blindness.* 1. Physical. They lost the power of distinct vision. 2. Mental. They were the subjects of illusions. The imagination was diseased, so that they were deceived by false appearances. They acted as distracted persons. 3. Moral. They madly persisted in their design, though an act of Providence had rendered it impossible of accomplishment.

Moral infatuation usually precedes God's great judgments upon men and nations.

The Scriptural signs that the judgment is near are:—1. That God abandons men or communities to out-breaking and presumptuous sins. 2. That warnings and chastisements fail to produce their effect, and especially when the person grows harder under them. 3. That God removes the good from any community—so, before the Flood, so before the destruction of Jerusalem. 4. The deep, undisturbed security of those over whom it is suspended.—*(Gosman.)*

Many a one is hardened by the good word of God, and, instead of receiving the counsel, rages at the messenger: when men are grown to that pass, that they are no whit better by afflictions, and worse with admonitions, God finds it time to strike. Now, Lot's guests begin to show themselves angels, and first delivered Lot in Sodom, then from Sodom; first strike them with blindness whom they will after consume with fire. How little did the Sodomites think that vengeance was so near them! While they were groping in the streets, and cursing those whom they could not find, Lot with the angels is in secure light, and sees them miserable, and foresees them burning. It is the use of God to blind and besot those whom He means to destroy. —*(Bishop Hall.)*

Blindness, both of body and mind, saith Aben Ezra, such as tormented their eyes, as if they had been pricked with thorns, as the Hebrew word signifies. And yet they continue groping for the door, as if they were ambitious of destruction, which now was next door by. *Deus quem destruit dementat.* So Pharaoh, when under that palpable three days' darkness, rageth against God, and threateneth Moses with death. Though doomsday should be to-morrow next, wicked men must and will serve their lusts. *Vale lumen amicum!* said Theotimus in St. Ambrose, who chose rather to lose his sight than his sin.—*(Trapp.)*

God sends judicial blindness upon wicked men, and thus their purposes are frustrated. They weary themselves in a vain effort.

The persecuted for righteousness' sake have the angels on their side, and no weapon that is formed against them can prosper.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 12-22.

THE DELIVERANCE OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN THE TIME OF JUDGMENT.

I. God makes known to them the way of deliverance. The angels who had come for the salvation of Lot commanded him, saying, "Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters which are here, lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city" (verse 15.) He is told, further, to escape for his life, not to look behind him, but to escape to the mountain lest he be consumed (verse 17). This was God's revealed way of deliverance. This was His purpose to save, and the manner in which that purpose was to be accomplished. But we learn from this history—1. *That God's way of deliverance is often against our will.* Lot lingered as if still unwilling to leave the city. As the Heb. word imports, he delayed, or hindered himself. He suffered many cares and anxieties of business still to hold him to this doomed spot. The angels had to lay their hands upon Lot, and his wife, and his two daughters, and deliver them from destruction, as it were, by a loving violence. The causes of this lingering and hesitation are—(1) *We forget what should be our chief care.* It was *life* here that was at stake. House, and goods, and residence in a rich and pleasant country are of little moment when compared with the value of our lives, with a possession so close and intimate, nearer to us than anything else—ourselves. A man is not profited if he gains the whole world and loses *himself*. It is folly, when the greatest treasure of all is threatened, to run any risk by losing time over insignificant matters. Such conduct shows that we lack that true nobility of soul which only sets value upon the highest and best things. (2) *We are paralysed by fear.* The thought that there is danger near fills us with alarm. We are like those upon whose vital power sudden fear places an arrest. Fear is one of the greatest foes of faith—a hindrance to all effective action. The man who hid his talent in the earth was moved thereto by fear, and therefore he could do nothing. It is only by looking *from* our danger to God and His salvation that we can be safe. We learn further: 2. *That God's way of deliverance does not destroy the necessity for our own exertion.* (Verse 17.) Life is at stake, and Lot has no promise of safety but in flight to the mountain. If he lingers behind, and refuses to make haste, he must be involved in the general destruction. God will not save him without some effort on his part. This is our case. Nothing less than our life is concerned. We are in danger of failing to attain to our better and nobler life, of falling into the condemnation of the wicked. There is only one way of escape—by renouncing ourselves, our trust in our own strength, our sins, and accepting fully of God's way of salvation. We must not linger in the plain of self, or stand still in regretful contemplation of what we have renounced, but must flee to the mountain, to the rock that is higher than we are, for there alone can we rest in safety. 3. *That God's way of deliverance is only effective through His mercy.* Lot and his family were brought forth and set without the city, "the Lord being merciful unto him." (Verse 16.) It was by constraining love that he was saved after all. His purpose was too weak to have accomplished his deliverance, and had he been left to himself he would have perished in the common destruction.

> "E'en Lot himself could lingering stand
>   When vengeance was in view ;
> 'Twas mercy plucked him by the hand
>   Or he had perished too."

Besides the call of God bidding us to "escape," and showing the way of escape, there must be a powerful influence of mercy, otherwise we shall fail of salvation.

II. God is ready to deliver others for their sakes. The household of Lot, son-in-law and sons, were offered the same mercy. Though some of them were reckless and unworthy they were allowed to share in the blessings of the household covenant. Any connection with the people of God is a privilege which may be improved into a real benefit. 1. *Hence the righteous can offer salvation to the last.* Lot went out and warned his sons-in-law of the coming danger and exhorted them to escape. (Verse 14.) He was to them a preacher of righteousness, even when they were upon the verge of doom. The door of mercy remains open to the last, and men may find salvation though they come late. It is our duty to proclaim the mercy of God towards sinners while there is time. 2. *Our efforts may be unavailing.* Lot "seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law." (Verse 14.) His warning had no effect upon them. They refused to receive the offered mercy. They saw no danger; all things were around them as they had been, and there were no signs that so terrible a destruction was prepared and about to fall. They regarded Lot's words as idle tales, and they believed them not. Thus when sinners are informed of their danger, and exhorted to seek the way of safety, they do not believe that they are in any peril, and therefore despise the message.

III. **In the midst of abounding corruption only the few escape.** After all this warning and exhortation, only Lot, his wife, and two daughters, escaped from the destruction of Sodom; and one, even of this small number, perished by the way! So it was in the Deluge, and in all God's great judgments on the world. There are times when the wickedness of nations grows rank, and almost universal. That wickedness shows itself in various forms. At one time, it is laxity of morals; at another, it is a prevailing unbelief and a spirit of blasphemy; or it is lawless defiance of authority; or it may be worldliness, coarse or refined. It has ever happened that only the few have escaped the contagion of the abounding iniquity. Such is the character of the world, mostly evil! The majority are found ranging themselves on the side of the kingdom of darkness. These facts, though painful, must be admitted. They teach us—1. *The tremendous power of evil.* The moral infection of sin has clung to human nature with an awful tenacity. The course of time, the progress of humanity in arts, sciences, and the refinements of life, have not sufficed to wear out the strength of the poison. This power of evil is a sad and disquieting factor in our estimate of the grandeur of man. 2. *They teach us to approve of God's great judgments upon mankind.* The Scriptures record the wholesale destruction of peoples and nations on account of their sin. With our compassionate feelings we sometimes think these judgments harsh, or even unjust. But we become reconciled to them, and are ready to believe that they have a sufficient cause, when we think of the enormous wickedness which has provoked them. The long-suffering of God is great; it waits, but there must be an end. If we could only know all that God knows, and see all that He sees of the wickedness of mankind, instead of being distressed at the rigour of His judgments, we should only wonder at His patience.

IV. **The righteous can only be saved out of the scenes of iniquity, not in them.** Lot and his family could not be saved while they remained in Sodom. As for Lot, the men "brought him forth, and set him without the city." (Verse 16.) The world is the City of Destruction, and we must separate ourselves from it or we cannot be saved. The principles of the world, its spirit, its acts, are enmity against God. We cannot separate ourselves from the outward world, either of nature or of man, but we can be unworldly as Christ was unworldly. He lived and mingled with men in the ways of social intercourse, but He had far other aims, and was sustained by higher hopes and principles. What God requires of us is that we should not partake of that spirit of life which rules in the hearts of men who are alienated from Him. If we are saved, it must be in the kingdom of light and not in the kingdom of darkness. It must be not in the Sodom which God has doomed, but in the place to which He invites us.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 12. Here we are to mark the mercy of the Divine proceedings. Ten righteous men would have saved the city; but there seems to have been only one. He, however, shall at all events escape; and not only so, but all that belong to him shall be delivered for his sake, or, if otherwise, it shall be their own fault. It shall not be for the want of a proffered opportunity or a faithful warning. Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or whatever he had, are directed to be brought out of the doomed city, which was rapidly approaching the crisis of its fate. That remarkable feature of the Divine administration by which the wicked are blessed for the sake of the righteous is here most signally illustrated; for that such were the sons-in-law is evident from the contemptuous manner in which they received the warning, and the fact that they perished in the perdition of the city.—(Bush.)

There are privileges which men have from their connection with the righteous, and to which they have no proper right on the ground of personal character. The indirect advantages of the piety of the few are great. The world little knows for how many blessings it is indebted to the Church.

Verse 13. God sends judgments upon wicked nations only after all admonitions and chastisements have failed.

The sins of men have a voice which assails heaven and dares its justice.

Even the good angels are God's executioners. And the first execution they did in the world that we read of was among these filthy Sodomites. So it will be, likely, at the last day. And St. Peter seems to say as much. (2 Peter ii. 9.) The Lord reserves the unjust to the day of judgment to be punished, "but chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness." Mark that chiefly.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 14. Lot is found here in the character of a preacher of righteousness, and his message is an example of that kind of warning which must be given to sinners. 1. Abrupt and pointed. The case is urgent and admits of no delay. Those concerned, in this instance, were personally addressed, and the danger to which they were exposed was announced in few words. The preacher knew the danger, and men make short work of it when they feel intensely. Like the disciples in the storm, who did not venture upon a long discourse regarding the violence of the winds and the rage of the sea, but had only time to say, "Lord, save us, or we perish." Sinners must be roused by sharp and cutting words which admit of no doubtful meaning. 2. Authoritative. Lot signified to these sinners the authority by which he spake: "For the Lord will destroy this city." Ministers of the Gospel have authority for warning sinners of their danger. 3. Affectionate. Lot went forth at an unusual hour of the night to warn those who were bound to him by the ties of natural relationship. We may be sure that, though his language was earnest and faithful, yet his manner was loving and kind. From the deep affection of his heart he would implore them to obey his message. In such a manner must the righteous preach to sinners as to those who belong to the same family, but who are unworthy and rebellious children. 4. In the face of all discouragements. Lot's message was received with derision, yet he warned them to the last. We must do our duty though our message may be rejected with a heartless disdain. We have delivered our souls.

Lot at once believes what the angels tell him; and he is not afraid to avow his belief. Often before he has warned the ungodly to flee from the wrath to come. Often has he testified against their wickedness; and knowing the terror of the Lord he has sought to persuade men. But who hath believed his report? All day long he has stretched forth his hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people; and as their conversation has vexed him, so his interference has only served to irritate them. Even his own relatives and acquaintances—the very men who are, or are to be, his sons-in-law, to whom his daughters are married or betrothed—are led astray with the error of the wicked. Where are they during this memorable night, when Lot is entertaining his holy guests, and the people have risen in their fury against him? Have they turned their backs on the dwelling of the righteous? Are they keeping company with sinners—if not encouraging, at least not disowning their iniquity? Well might Lot hesitate in these circumstances—however warm his natural affection, and however strong his sense of duty—and be tempted to conclude that, having enough to do at home, he need not venture on a fruitless experiment abroad. It is incurring risk in vain. For how can he expect to be believed, when he has so incredible a tale to tell.—(*Candlish.*)

The derision of sinners is one of the saddest griefs of the righteous. They recognise in this those signs of infatuation which go before destruction. Mocking is the last refuge of those who oppose the truth, and there is a laughter which is mad.

The lack of belief in God has the same effect upon the soul as the privation of the organs of special sense has upon the body. Therefore men can sport unawares upon the very edge of destruction.

He warns them like a prophet, and advises them like a father, but both in vain: he seems to them as if he mocked, and they do more than seem to him to mock again.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

The Gospel message has often been regarded as an appeal to the fears and credulities of men, but the end will show that the danger against which they are warned is a dread reality.

The derisive mirth and scorn of sinners in this world will be their sad remembrance in the world to come.

The impenitent may scoff at the warnings of the righteous, but their city in which they trusted shall surely be destroyed.

The most faithful preaching may, in many instances, fail of success. In mechanics we can calculate the whole effect of a number of forces acting in certain directions, but we cannot with the same confidence predict the effect of spiritual forces. We have to deal with that unmanageable factor, the perversity of the human will.

Sodom a type of the spiritual Babylon (Rev. xi. 8). Whoever will not be borne away and crushed with the godless, he must early and cheerfully separate himself from them while he has time and leisure (Rev. xviii. 4).—(*Lange.*)

Verse 15. The commendable faith and piety of Lot were still mingled with some degree of human infirmity. He was disposed to linger, and had to be hastened by the angels. It is easy, indeed, to conceive that one in his situation, though prepared, on the whole, to obey the Divine summons, should still have felt a strong repugnance to an instantaneous flight. His was a struggle like that of the endangered mariner who feels that his only chance of escaping shipwreck and saving his life is to cast all his goods overboard, and yet hesitates and lingers, and can scarcely bring himself to part with what he holds so dear. In Lot's case, however, we may have the charity to believe it was not solely the thought of losing all his worldly substance that made him falter. It was, indeed, putting his fortitude to a severe test to know that he must forsake all, and go forth homeless and destitute, he knew not whither; and our own habitual, practical distrust of Providence enables us but too easily to enter into his feelings, and perhaps to find an apology for them on this score. It may be, also, that his heart was agonised at the thought of leaving so many relatives behind him to perish in the perdition of the city; and we may suppose that it was mainly in consequence of this strong conflict that he so deferred his flight that his deliverers were at last obliged to have recourse to that kind of violence to hasten his departure. Such, in thousands of instances, is the struggle in the minds of men when they are called to leave all and flee from the wrath to come. They do not wholly disbelieve or reject the warnings addressed to them; they are convinced that there is peril in their path, and that ere long something must be done to avoid it; an awful sound is ever and anon in their ears, urging them to expedite their flight from the devoted city; but still they linger, and still *would* linger to their final undoing, did not the same compulsory mercy of heaven which rescued Lot, save them also from the consequences of their destructive apathy.—(*Bush.*)

Such is the strength of temptation, and the infirmity even of the best, that the righteous are only saved with difficulty. Their will is too weak, and even *they* must fail unless constrained by the loving violence of Divine grace.

The love of God not only seeks us and warns us of our danger, but also draws us by a sweet compulsion.

Even those who are in the way of salvation must be hastened on to the place of safety by urging upon them the danger of perdition.

Are you in danger of perishing in the midst of those on whom the wrath of God lies? Are you entangled in the world's friendship, and is the world swiftly to be judged? Is the morning almost already arisen—the morning of the judgment day? And are you still to be delivered? Is the harvest past? Is the summer ended? And are you not saved? And when you open your drowsy eyes, and listlessly catch the hasty summons to arise—will you still complain that it is too soon to be up? And will you still murmur your fond and deprecating entreaty—"Yet a little sleep, a little slumber?" Bless the Lord, if in such a crisis He has not taken you at your word, and let you alone, as you wished Him to do. He leaves you not to repose. He cuts short your half-waking and dreamy musing. He hastens you, He fairly arouses and alarms you—not dealing with you tenderly, as if He feared to give you pain, but, if need be, with unrelenting and unpitying severity, shaking you from your security, and telling you the truth. Awake! Arise! Lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.—(*Candlish.*)

It was a source of spiritual danger to Lot to have gone to dwell in Sodom at all. That danger had now arrived at a critical stage, and he must do that which he ought to have done at the first—separate himself without delay from that wicked community.

Verse 16. There is, indeed, scarcely any surer or more characteristic sign of the Lord's manner of delivering the godly out of temptation than this. He uses a constraining force, and teaches them to use it. The kingdom of heaven is taken by violence. For, first, He rouses them betimes, and hastens them to depart, on pain of instant destruction. Again, when they loiter and linger, loath to leave all the world behind, He constrains, and as it were, compels them. Nor will He suffer them so much as to look back or pause; onwards, still onwards, for your lives, is His word. Thus decisive and peremptory is the Lord's dealing with those whom He would save. Nor is it more peremptory than the case requires. For, in this sense, it is true that the righteous scarcely are saved; 1. Not without a loud and startling, as well as a timely alarm. 2. Not without a powerful hand laying hold of them, and dragging them, almost reluctant, along. 3. Not without a call to them to see to the completeness as well as to the promptitude of their escape, and a terrible warning against a single glance behind.—(*Candlish.*)

We can only be saved from the destruction of the wicked by a loving hand laid upon us—that love which constrains. The love of Christ softens and subdues our nature, so that we feel its gentle power and follow the direction of His will.

If we are saved, it is against our natural will. The mercy of God is, therefore, displayed in drawing us towards Himself.

Such is the infirmity of human nature that men who have principle of sufficient strength to renounce the world, are yet subject to a kind of infatuation when they seriously make that attempt. They are like the wanderer amidst the snows, who feels the fatal torpor creeping upon his frozen limbs, and is tempted to take his rest in what must prove the sleep of death. He needs some one at hand to rouse him up and urge him on to the place of safety.

We are all naturally in Sodom; if God did not hale us out, whilst we linger we should be condemned with the world. If God meets with a *very good field* He pulls up the weeds and lets the corn grow; if *indifferent*, He lets the corn and weeds grow together; if very ill, He gathers the few ears of corn and burns the weeds.—(*Bishop Hall.*)

The losses and afflictions of the righteous are only God's way of laying His loving hand upon them, to the intent that they might not be condemned with the world.

The ultimate force upon which our salvation depends is the loving mercy of God. Our purpose is too weak to secure salvation, even after the promise of it has been given.

Our infirmities would be ever bringing us into danger only that the Lord has compassion upon them.

It is the duty of the godly man to remove himself from every scene which endangers the safety of his soul.

Verse 17. It is impossible not to spiritualise this history, for considered in itself it has little use. Here we discern the Gospel message. 1. We must strive to escape from our danger. The safety of our souls is involved. We shall lose all if we remain in a state of nature. 2. We must not swerve from our purpose to attain the end of our striving. We may look down through despondency; we ought to look up; but whether we look down or look up we must never look back. 3. We must actually obtain our salvation. We are not safe until we have reached the mountain—until we have laid hold on Christ. There is no salvation in any other.

To look behind upon that world which we have set our hearts to forsake is:—1. A cause of serious delay. This is the least mischief conceivable by such a course. We certainly interrupt our journey, and delay to make our salvation secure. 2. Shows a divided interest, a distracted attention. Our purpose is hereby weakened, and we cannot follow God with all our heart. 3. A sign of unbelief. It shows some lingering love towards the sins we have left. It is an interruption of the life of our faith which, should it continue, would be fatal.

There were many places about the "plain" which seemed to promise a safe shelter to Lot, but he was told not to stay therein. There are human systems of thought and belief which seem to offer shelter and repose to our souls, but there is no safety for us but in Christ.

God Himself—the Covenant angel—is the Speaker here, and such He is in His message of salvation to mankind. His command to us is, *Be saved*, which is also an invitation, a privilege. With the command He furnishes the strength to perform.

Salvation implies the effort to renounce ourselves—a hard work. Our Lord requires His disciple to take up His cross and follow Him. This is but a merciful severity.

But shall we say that these Divine monitors were therefore impertinently officious or needlessly severe? Assuredly the more faithful and earnest they were in the discharge of their duty, the more real benevolence they exercised; nor could they have displayed their love in any better way than by seizing hold of them to quicken their pace, and urging them by the most powerful considerations to secure their own safety. In like manner should the earnest appeals and exhortations of Christ's ministers to the impenitent be regarded. They are really prompted by the most benevolent motives. Knowing the tenors of the Lord they endeavour to persuade men. In uttering the denunciations of heaven they may be accused as needlessly harsh or severe; but it is a most unjust imputation, for what they speak will soon be found true; and in thus discharging their duty they perform an office worthy of an angel. They believe God's threatenings, and therefore they speak; and should they speak smooth things to their hearers, and prophesy deceits, they would prove their bitterest enemies. In this urgent matter concealment is treachery and fidelity is love. They must be an echo of the angel's voice, and cry aloud, "Escape for your lives, look not behind you, nor tarry in all the plain." With what altered emotions does Lot now survey that ensnaring plain which had been his great temptation! For many a day he had roved at ease with his flocks and herds over that goodly ground; but now he is to pass over it with the utmost speed, not a moment is to be lost. Fly he must for his life to the mountains beyond, for a deluge of fire is about to break forth and flow on that accursed soil! Ah, how easily can the hand of God turn our choicest worldly comforts into wormwood and gall! How easily can He rob our enjoyments of their zest, and convert our earthly Edens into a dreary waste! "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."—(*Bush.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 18-22.

The Infirmities of the Heirs of Salvation.

Lot was a representative of the heirs of salvation, inasmuch as it was God's gracious purpose to save him from the judgments coming upon the ungodly; and he worked with that purpose—was obedient to the voice which called him to flee from destruction and make for safe shelter. His efforts betrayed human weakness.

I. These infirmities are seen during the progress of their deliverance. Lot did not obey the command to escape at once to the mountain, but craved the indulgence of resting by the way in a place of his own choice. It was while he was being saved that he showed this weakness. And seekers after salvation are marked more or less by the like infirmities. In the case of Lot, these were—1. *The infirmity of fear.* "I cannot escape to the mountain lest some evil take me, and I die" (verse 19). He was afraid lest the fiery stream should overtake him before he reached the mountain. Had his faith been strong, he would have had courage to obey in the face of all the suggestions of sense. 2. *Wilfulness.* He sets his desire upon a city lying in the course of his flight, where he imagines he shall be safe (verse 20). His request appeared most reasonable to himself, for this city was quite unimportant, and surely it might be spared. "Is it not a little one?" he said (verse 20). He committed the folly of attempting to improve upon God's appointed way of deliverance. He sought to interfere with God's plan by some expedients of his own. Such is the wilfulness of many who are seeking the salvation of their souls. They stop short of the end to which they should attain without delay, and adopt some shelter of their own choosing. The subjugation of our will entirely to the will of God is the result of long training. 3. *Forgetfulness of past mercies.* God had shown great and marvellous mercy to Lot. We should expect that his sense of those marked favours would have been so fresh and strong that he would have been ready to go wherever God commanded him. But his character was too weak to realise properly both past and present blessings. It takes some time to rise to a sense of what God is doing for us. 4. *A lingering selfishness.* This characteristic clave to Lot to the last. He was selfish when he chose Sodom for a dwelling-place, and he is selfish now when he asks that this city may be spared merely for his own convenience. He lacked that largeness of soul which inspired Abraham when he prayed for Sodom and Gomorrah. So, many who have taken steps to obey the call of God yet allow their selfishness to stand in their way.

II. God is gracious towards such infirmities. God accepted Zoar as the temporary place of retreat for His servant (verse 21). He bears with the infirmity of His people. Where they have a desire and a firm purpose to flee to the refuge of His salvation, He pardons their many shortcomings in the effort. His charity covers the multitude of their sins. Such are the concessions of the Divine goodness towards human weakness. God "knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust" (Psa. ciii. 14). In the worst desolation there is some bright spot where we may rest and be refreshed, lest the strength of our souls should be tried above measure. But such an indulgence can be only *temporary*. Lot soon found that Zoar was not safe, and he was glad at last to escape to the mountain (verse 30). We must not rest in what is intended to be merely a provisional shelter, but be ready to quit it soon. God indulges our weakness that He might lead us to higher things.

III. There are certain conditions which fit them for such merciful indulgence. 1. *When they have already commenced the flight from danger.* Lot believed that destruction was coming upon Sodom, and was now in the act of fleeing from the threatened danger. He had taken steps to secure his salvation, otherwise this favour would have been denied. God must see some desires towards Himself, some acceptance of His message, or He will not grant His great favours. We must break off with our sins, and fly from the danger to which they expose us, or else we cannot expect salvation. Those who remain in Sodom can only look for Sodom's doom. 2. *When, though they have not reached it, they are still seeking a sure refuge.* Lot had not yet reached the mountain, but his purpose was still set towards it He desired to obey the command of God. His will was accepted for the deed. If we are still seeking salvation, though we may not have attained to all that Christ has purchased for us, He will pity our weakness. He graciously encourages the first beginnings of a new life. Though there be much smoke and ashes, yet if He discovers a single spark of a better desire and hope in us, He will fan it to a flame. Mercy begins the distribution of her gifts as soon as we set out for Christ. 3. *When they are satisfied not to rest in anything short of God's command.* Lot's better desire was to obey God to the end, by escaping to the mountain. He was soon convinced that the place he had chosen was not intended to be his permanent refuge. Nothing short of Christ, whether it be the Church, the sacraments, or the ministry, can be our permanent resting-place. We are not safe until we have come to the Mountain, and laid hold upon the strength of our salvation. There is no other sure refuge for our souls but Christ.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 18, 19. But who shall prescribe to the Almighty? or limit the Holy One of Israel? Are we wiser than He? Have we any contrivance by which we can surpass Him? He lets us sometimes have our way, but to our woe at last.—(*Trapp*).

It must certainly be set down to a weak and wavering faith in Lot that he now made this request. His duty was to have yielded simple obedience to the declared will of Heaven. He should have known that what God dictated was best; that if He had commanded him to go to the mountains, He would certainly enable him to get there, and that He could protect him there as anywhere else. But he pleads hard for permission to flee to the neighbouring city of Zoar, and hopes that he may be excused in this desire, seeing it was but a "little one." The preferring of such a request in such circumstances we should suppose would have drawn forth some marked expression of the Divine displeasure. But God lends a gracious ear to his petition. His infimity is not rebuked; his request was granted; the city was spared for his sake. In this God designed at once to show how much the fervent prayer of a righteous man avails; and at the same time, by the result to teach his short-sighted servant how much wiser a part he would have acted had he confided in a childlike manner in God, and fled to the mountain in the first instance. (Verse 30.) This instance should fix firmly in our minds the conviction that we can never gain anything by attempting to improve upon God's appointments. He will choose infinitely better than we can for ourselves. Let us learn, moreover, another lesson from this incident. If a petition marked and marred with such faultiness as that of Lot on this occasion still met with a favourable hearing, what efficacy may we conceive to pertain to those prayers which are prompted by a yet more believing spirit, and framed more distinctly in accordance with the revealed will of Heaven?—(*Bush.*)

It is allowed to us to plead the privileges of our justification. 1. To ground our petition for mercies on what God has done for us already. His grace has saved us, and His mercy has been magnified towards us in many gifts of His love. We may use our experience of the past to encourage our hope for the future. "Because Thou has been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice." (Psa. lxiii. 7.) 2. To crave pardon for human infirmity in our prayers. Lot knew that it was human weakness which led him to make this request. He was quite overcome by his fears; yet he thought that he could rely upon a mercy which was so plentiful, and which was shown to him in so signal a manner. The mercy of God manifested towards us in our salvation is so great that we may venture to trust it to pardon the lapses of our infirmity. Infinite love will make it all right at last if our hearts are only true and faithful.

Verse 20. The faith of Lot, simple and sincere as it was, could not be considered perfect. He had his misgivings and doubts. The distant mountain whither he had to flee filled him with anxiety and alarm. "I cannot escape to the mountain lest some evil take me and I die." Might no nearer, no safer, no less dreary refuge be found? It is hard to be all at once cast out upon the solitary wild. Such thoughts vexed the rescued soul of Lot. But in the Lord he found relief. He did not nurse these melancholy musings sullenly and suspiciously in his own bosom. He poured them forth into the ears of the Lord. With humble and holy boldness he ventured to represent his case to a present God—to plead, to reason, to expostulate, with a touching and pathetic, a childlike earnestness, such as only the spirit of adoption, the spirit that cries Abba, Father, could inspire.—(*Candlish.*)

God is honoured by our using the liberty of taking all our doubts and fears to Him. He can detect what is true and real in us in the midst of all our infirmity.

"Is it not a little one?" Thus men use their reason to sustain requests which have but imperfect conformity to the will of God.

Here we perceive Lot's constant appeal to self-interest; selfishness clung to that man's very soul. We should expect that after all the marvellous mercy shown by God to Lot, that he would have been ready to go wherever He commanded. But no; Lot asks that Zoar may be saved. And God marvellously accepts this demand. Now this shows how God deals with the soul. We use large language; we talk of self-sacrifice, self-devotion, and yet there has always been a secret reservation of some small Zoar; still God accepts. He leaves us some human affection, something to remind us of our earthly home. He weans us by degrees, that so, step by step, leaving earth behind, we may ascend the mountain top, and want nothing but the lovely love of God.—(*Robertson.*)

Verse 21. *I have accepted thee.* Heb. "I have lifted up thy face," *i.e.*, I have a compassionate respect to thee, and will gratify thee by granting this request. The expression probably arose from an Eastern custom. Persons there, in preferring a petition, instead of falling upon their knees, often prostrate themselves with their face to the ground. When the petition is accepted, the prince or potentate commands them to be raised from their lowly posture, which is expressed by "lifting up the face." In common usage, therefore, the phrase is clearly synonymous with "showing favour." Thus doth a gracious God, according to the words of the Psalmist (Psa. cxlv. 19), "fulfil the desire of them that fear Him; He also will hear their cry and will save them."—(*Bush.*)

Before we reach our final salvation we shall need many an indulgence by the way. The great mercy of God allows for the dangers and temptations of our pilgrimage.

You may see the Lord's goodness in the land of the living. In the most sweeping desolation, levelling the houses and cities of your habitation to the ground—in the wide waste beneath which all things bright and fair seem buried—some little Zoar is left, some haven of rest in which the weary spirit may recruit its strength. Such earthly refreshment may the redeemed child of God, who has turned his back on Sodom, lawfully ask—such green spot in the desert—such little city of refuge amid the storm—in the bosom of domestic peace, and the endearments of a quiet home—that he may not be tried above measure. Only let his request be moderate. "See, now, it is a little one." So Lot pleads for this earthly boon. Let it also be a request preferred in faith as to a friend and father, with submission to His wisdom and trust in His love. And if the request be granted—if the object of his fond regard, for which he speaks, be spared to him—if he get a little Zoar to flee to—let him not set his heart on it too much. For a brief space he may rejoice in it. But let him be ready to quit it soon, as Lot did, and, if need be, to dwell in the mountain and in the cave; for that in the end may be the Lord's way of thoroughly humbling and proving him, to the saving of his soul.—(*Candlish.*)

Zoar, of all the five cities, was spared by Lot's prayer. God suffers even His great judgments upon sinners to be modified in the range of their effect by the prayers of the righteous.

Verse 22. God is pleased to bind Himself by what is necessary for the salvation of His people. Lot must be made safe before the fiery judgment comes down upon the cities of the plain. Hence learn: 1. God's great favour towards the righteous. 2. The efficacy of their prayers and intercessions.

Even after the first step towards salvation has been taken, it is necessary that Divine warnings should be repeated that we might escape the snares coming upon the ungodly.

The inability here mentioned is, of course, wholly of the moral and not of the physical kind, similar in its nature though arising from an opposite cause to that affirmed of our Saviour (Mark vi. 5): "He could there do no mighty work," by reason of the unbelief of the people. He *could* not because he *would* not. There was a moral unfitness between such a state of mind and such a display of power, so that He determined not to put it forth. The Most High is pleased to represent His hands as bound by His paramount regard to the welfare of His people. He can do nothing towards the punishment of the wicked till their safety is secured. Had we not a Divine warrant for the use of such language it would doubtless be a high presumption in us to employ it; and when we find the Holy Spirit adopting it we still pause in devout admiration, mingled with a latent misgiving whether we are indeed to understand the words in their most obvious sense. But our doubts are precluded by adverting to numerous parallel instances of God's dealings with His people. On more than one occasion, when He had determined to execute vengeance on Israel for their perverseness, the intercessions of Moses are represented as having been in effect irresistible, so that the threatened judgment was averted. What an argument is this for our pressing earnestly forward to the acquisition of the same character. If we are prompted at all by the noble ambition of becoming benefactors of our race, let us seek to form ourselves on the models proposed in the Scriptures, and thus by being made eminently acceptable to God, become in the highest degree useful to the communities in which we live.—(*Bush.*)

Judgment is well represented in the Scripture as God's "strange work." He takes greater pleasure in the salvation of men, to secure which He will even consent to delay His judgments.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 23-25.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN.

The previous history shows how they had long been ripe for judgment, now their last day and the inevitable hour had come.

I. It was sudden. 1. *As regards the objects of it.* They had no belief that God would interfere, but thought themselves secure in their wickedness. The plains around them were full of rich beauty, their cities were flourishing, their houses were filled with coarse plenty. The constancy of Nature was uninterrupted, the bounties of Providence continued without stint or sign of withdrawal. The sun rose brightly on that day, and it promised to be fair and prosperous as any other. But, in a moment, the fiery rain from heaven came down and swept them with sudden destruction. This is an example of what shall take place when the last Judgment shall arrive. It shall be then "as it was in the days of Lot" (Luke xvii. 28-30). Men who have no real belief in the evil of sin, and the fate to which it exposes them, are unconcerned to the last. As regards the terrible designs of God's judgments they are like men asleep, but when that judgment comes, they awake on a sudden to the awful reality. The retribution prepared for the wicked appears to them to slumber, as if utterly quiet and harmless, but the time comes when God awakens, and then He despises their image (Psa. lxxiii. 20). And what He despises cannot endure, but shall suddenly be destroyed. 2. *Not sudden, however, as regards the Author of it.* The infinite perfections of God forbid the thought that there should be with Him anything like surprise. He has not to adapt Himself to emergencies by a quick decision. This terrible judgment was no sudden thought of God. His anger is slow and deliberate. The doom of Sodom and Gomorrah had already been fixed when God spoke with Abraham, but had been delayed partly on account of Lot, and partly to clear such an act of judgment from the suspicion of haste. Even in His most terrible deeds, God makes it appear to men that His ways are equal. His vengeance is judicial, not the violence of passion. Christ reveals to His chosen ones what the end shall be. They know what to expect, and look for His appearing. But to the rest, destruction comes at an hour when they are not aware. The swiftness of the lightning is the fittest natural image of God's appearing in judgment.

II. It was the direct act of God. The record distinctly states that "the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." Natural agencies were no doubt used, but we have proof that God was present not in an ordinary but in an extraordinary manner. There are distinct evidences of a special act of Divine vengeance. 1. *The destruction was predicted.* God had already made known to Abraham, and to Lot and his family, what He was about to do. This destruction was not, therefore, an effect arising from the blind forces of nature, but a special act of the God of nature, who imparted to His favoured servants the secret of his design. **2.** *The destruction was, in its nature, extraordinary.* It was out of the way of the usual course of Providence. There has been nothing like it either before or since. No one who had witnessed it could doubt that it was pre-eminently destruction from the Almighty. God rained down fire out of heaven, His agency being clearly manifest as when He destroyed the old world by a flood.

III. It was complete. "Those cities," "*all* the plain," "*all* the inhabitants," "that which grew upon the ground" (verse 25). Here was utter ruin, and absolutely without remedy. Every habitation was overturned, every animal and vegetable destroyed—every man perished in this overwhelming disaster. Lot and his family only excepted, the destruction was absolutely total. Their degeneracy was universal, and so was their destruction. Learn—1. *That God's judgments, though deserved, tarry long.* They had filled up the measure of their iniquities long ago. While their punishment was delayed they had opportunity to avert it. They sheltered a holy man whose precept and example might have converted their souls. Prayers were offered up on their account. They had a long space in which to consider their ways and turn to the Lord. Learn—2. *That without timely repentance His judgments are sure to fall.* God's warning to sinners are no empty threats, but will issue in the terrible facts. Long as the course of history has been or shall be to the end, judgment at length must fall upon the impenitent. Like unto Sodom and Gomorrah, the wicked world is doomed.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 23. The sun rose brightly that morning; but before it had sunk below the western horizon the blood was cold in many a heart that burned with unhallowed fire, and many a pulse had ceased to beat that a few hours before throbbed with selfish passion. Down came the burning red rain from heaven, the fearful expression of the wrath of God. This strange flood of fire did for the bodies of men what death does for the soul. The attitude in which it found every man, there it sealed him.—(*Robertson.*)

The sunlight of their last day fell upon these wicked cities and found their inhabitants as unconscious and incredulous of their danger as ever. Night is the time of fears and alarms, the fit season for great disasters. It was at night that the destroying angel passed through Egypt to slay the first-born—at night when the sword of the Lord smote the camp of Assyria and destroyed one hundred and eighty-five thousand men—at night that the shadow of a man's hand wrote on the wall of Belshazzar's palace the awful words announcing the destruction of his kingdom and of his life. But day is the time of security, for light reveals danger, and makes the way of escape easier. The gloomy fears of night are gone, and the morning brings with it gladness and the promise of a peaceful day. But to Sodom, this day brought unexpected vengeance. The danger of sin is great, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary.

When the sun rose upon Sodom with the promise of a fine day, could anything be further from their thoughts than the overwhelming tempest which almost immediately began to pour down upon them? Had they had the most distant idea of their perilous situation, with what avidity would they have seized the opportunity of escape, and with what persevering efforts would they have exerted themselves to reach a place of safety. But their confidence destroyed them. Let the heedless take warning. The breath of the Lord may kindle a stream of brimstone before they are aware. "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

Verse 24. Here the Lord is represented as present in the skies, whence the storm of desolation comes, and on the earth where it falls. The Dale of Siddim, in which the cities were, appears to have abounded in asphalt and other combustible materials. (Gen. xiv. 10.) The district was liable to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions from the earliest to the latest times. We read of an earthquake in the days of King Uzziah. An earthquake in 1759 destroyed many thousands of persons in the Valley of Baalbec. Josephus reports that the Salt Sea sends up in many places black masses of asphalt which are not unlike headless bulls in shape and size. After an earthquake in 1834, masses of asphalt were thrown up from the bottom. The lake lies in the lowest part of the valley of the Jordan, and its surface is about 1300 feet below the level of the sea. In such a hollow, exposed to the burning rays of an unclouded sun, its waters evaporate as much as it receives by the influx of the Jordan. Its present area is about forty-five miles by eight. The southern part of the lake seems to have been the original Dale of Siddim, in which were the cities of the vale. The remarkable salt hills lying on the south of the lake are still called Khashm Usdum (Sodom). A tremendous storm, accompanied with flashes of lightning and torrents of rain, impregnated with sulphur, descended upon the doomed cities. From the injunction to Lot to *flee to the mountain*, as well as from the nature of the soil, we may infer that at the same time with the awful conflagration there was a subsidence of the ground, so that the waters of the upper and original lake flowed in upon the former fertile and populous dale, and formed the shallow southern part of the present Salt Sea. In this pool of melting asphalt and sweltering seething waters, the cities seem to have sunk for ever, and left behind them no vestiges of their existence.—(*Murphy.*)

Brimstone and fire. The portion of the wicked—a suggestion of that fiery deluge which shall overwhelm the sinful world at the last day. (Psalms xi. 6, Jude 7.) These cities are an example to the world that God will, in the end, utterly vanquish His enemies.

What was the agency which effected this destruction? The Bible refers it to the immediate action of God; and the truth of Scripture, it is thought by some, depends upon establishing the miraculous character of the fall of these cities. A man goes now to the scene of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and tries to establish the fact that it was nothing but a natural volcanic eruption; and by getting rid of the supernatural agency, he thinks he has got rid of God Himself. Another goes to the same place, and, in his zeal for the supernatural, wishes to make out that the veracity of the Bible depends upon this kind of occurrence never having happened before. Do we mean, then, that only the *marvellous* incidents of nature,—the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah taking place at an appointed time,—only the positive miracles, are God's doing, and not the commonplace events of every-day life? Nay, God holds all the powers of nature in His hand; small events *may* be so directed by Him that we shall think them accident; but for all this it is no less certain that the most trifling act of every-day life is directed by Him. What we have to say is this: we agree with the supernaturalist in saying that God did it; we agree with the rationalist in saying that it was done by natural means. The natural is the work of God.—(*Robertson.*)

Though the descriptions which the Bible gives us of the future punishment of the wicked are but symbolical, yet such a dread judgment as this shows that they signify a terrible something. By a necessary law, sooner or later sin must bring its penalty. The wicked shall not go unpunished

Verse 25. *In all the plain.* He consumed its productions, He destroyed its beauty, He extinguished the very principles of its fertility, and submerged the ground itself under the waters of the Jordan, that the foot of man might never tread it more. The destruction was complete and irreparable; the country was in a manner blotted out of the map of Palestine, so fierce was the indignation, so terrible the overthrow. Thus were the cities of the plain, and the ground on which they stood, set forth for an example to every succeeding age; and to that awful catastrophe the sacred writers often allude in their denunciations of the Divine judgments against apostate Israel. (Deut. xxiii. 23, Hos. xi. 8.) —(*Bush.*)

The power of God is against sinners: they defy the Omnipotent, but in vain.

THE FATE OF LOT'S WIFE.

There was a great difference between the feelings of the elder and the younger branches of Lot's family on leaving their home. His sons and daughters left it in apparent obedience, but with the spirit of the inhabitants of the plain; it was not so with Lot's wife. It is not the character of age to accommodate itself readily to fresh circumstances. The old man does not feel inclined to launch himself afresh on the great ocean of the universe to seek new fortunes. He does not easily make fresh acquaintances, or transplant himself quickly from old haunts and homes. To youth there is a future; to old age there remains nothing but the present and the past. Therefore, while youth went on with its usual elastic step of buoyancy and hope, Lot's wife lingered; she regretted the home of her vanity and luxury, and the lava flood overwhelmed her, encrusted her with salt, and left her as a monument. The moral we are to draw from that is not left us to choose. Christ says, "Remember Lot's wife." It is worse to turn back, when once on the safe path, than never to have served God at all. They who have once tasted of the power of the world to come, let them beware lest they turn again. Sin is dangerous, but relapse is fatal. That is the reason why God so marvellously smooths the way for youth. Early joy enables the young man to make his first steps *surely*, with confidence in his Maker; love, gratitude, and all his best emotions are thus called forth. But if afterwards he falls, if he sinks back again into the world of evil, think you that his feelings will spur him on again in God's cause? Nay, because at the first time there was hope, the next all the hope is washed out; the stimulus of feeling is weaker because experience has broken down hope; he knows now what those resolves were worth! There is great difficulty in quitting evil after long habit. It becomes a home, and holiness is dull, and cheerless, and dreary. Youth, then, is the time for action—earnest, steady advancement, without looking back. St. Paul says, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, "Let us therefore fear lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it;" and again he shows us the evil of drawing back—"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him."—(*Robertson.*)

THE CAUSE AND DANGER OF BACKSLIDING.

The sad history of Lot's wife is a fearful warning to backsliders. She had taken steps to secure her salvation, but failed.

I. The cause of backsliding. The bitter root of her sin and error was *unbelief*. If she had strong faith in God she would have gone forward with an eye wholly fixed and intent on His command. Faith turns from all else to look to Him alone. This unbelief—1. *Leads to disobedience.* She broke the command, "Look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain." (Verse 17.) She stood still, and looked back with a longing heart on what she had left. The sinful past gains power over us when faith fails and our eye turns away from what God has set before us. Even if no sinful thoughts had prompted that look it was not innocent. The simple act of disobedience was a grave offence against God. By such an act our first father fell. In the case of the backslider there is always some unbelief which leads to some special acts of disobedience. 2. *Leads to indecision.* The looking back upon Sodom, when God had forbidden it, shows that her mind was not fully made up. She was moved at once by opposite feelings and desires. She was perplexed between God and the world. Unless we give up ourselves entirely to God's will, the result must be this indecision of character, when a very slight force will suffice to turn us back again to our old state.

II. The danger of backsliding. The awful doom of Lot's wife shows us how God regards this sin. 1. *There is the danger of forfeiting our salvation.* Lot's wife never reached the mountain. 2. *The danger of punishment.* If we turn away from God, and enter upon our old course, and remain in our sins, we must receive the penalty.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

We may fail in the way of salvation after we have made some progress on the journey.

How few escape the corruption that is in the world, and secure their own salvation! Only eight in the Flood, now but four from Sodom, and even one of these perished in the ruins of it.

They fall deepest into hell who fall backwards into hell. None are so near heaven as those that are convinced of sin—none so near to heaven as those who have quenched conviction.—*(Bunyan.)*

Her example is still preserved in sacred history as a warning to all who turn back from the ways of God. She persists throughout the ages "a pillar of salt"—a perpetual monument. What a sad counterpart is she to that woman who poured the precious ointment on the head of Jesus, and whose deed shall be held in remembrance wheresoever the Gospel is preached!

How fearfully is judgment here mingled with mercy! Lot was himself delivered, but at what an expense! It was a dismal spectacle to him to behold the city of his residence, including the habitations of his neighbours and probably of some of his own relatives, with all their inmates, sinking into the flames of the devouring element. But this was not all. One wave of anguish after another rolled over him. His company as he left the city was but small; and now, alas, when he has escaped, one is missing! His wife was the partner of his flight, but not of his preservation. The companion of his youth, the mother of his children, instead of sharing in joy of their deliverance, stands a pillar of salt in the ways towards Sodom, an awful monument of the danger of disobedience! This may be deemed a hard fate for a mere glance of the eye; but that glance, no doubt, was expressive of unbelief and a lingering desire to return. Behold, then, the goodness and severity of God—towards Lot that went forward, goodness; towards his wife that looked back, severity. Though nearly related to a righteous man, and a monument of distinguishing mercy in her deliverance out of Sodom, yet rebelling against an express mandate of Heaven, her privileges and relations availed her nothing; God would not connive at her disobedience; she became a mournful illustration of the truth that the righteous who turn away from their righteousness shall perish. While we lament her fate, let us profit by her example.—*(Bush.)*

May not the exile, now that he is fairly out of the city, relax his speed, and proceed a little more leisurely? May he not cast his eye once more on the scene he is forsaking, and indulge one last, lingering, farewell look? At his peril if he do it. One who should have shared his flight to the last has tried the experiment. She cleaves to her old home. She loves the world, and in the world's swift judgment she is miserably engulfed. One look behind is fatal. To pause is ruin. Who is there among you who has been persuaded and enabled to come out from among the ungodly—who has escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust? Remember Lot's wife. You may say, let me go and bury my father—let me just return and bid farewell to my friends—but one more embrace, but one more look, and then up and after Christ again. Tempt not the Lord. He who says, Follow Me, utters also these solemn words:—"No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." "If any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him." Be not of those "who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." And let the voice of Him who has led you forth, and set you free from the condemnation and corruption of the world lying in wickedness, ring continually in your ears when you would slacken your pace or abate your zeal. "Look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain."—(*Candlish.*)

We may contrast this flight from Sodom with the conduct which our Lord enjoins upon His disciples when He should come at the destruction of Jerusalem. So sudden was to be their flight, that the man on the house-top must not go down to fetch his clothes. The roofs of their houses were flat, and formed continuous terraces which terminated at the gates of the city, and by these they might escape with safety into the country. Their escape must be quite as sudden as Lot's from Sodom. The exhortation was peculiarly appropriate to His female disciples, for whose safety the tender heart of Jesus was concerned. The advice was taken, for when the Roman armies drew nigh, "many departed from the city as from a sinking ship." All the disciples acted upon the command of their Lord and arrived safely at Pella. None perished. The case of Lot's wife is in sad contrast to this parallel instance. Consider some of the circumstances that make her history full of instruction. 1. *She perished after solemn warning.* Lot was warned to escape, and while he lingered the men laid hold on him. Lingering nature requires the hand of special grace to save it from destruction. "By grace ye are saved." "But his wife looked back from behind him" with regret and affection to the place. She wavered, stopped by the way, shrank from the grasp of her angel-conductor, leaving her husband to go on his way alone. The storm suddenly came. She was a little too far from Zoar, and a little too near Sodom. She became scorched and encrusted by the burning flood, and remained on the spot—a petrified monument of Divine justice. She met the fate of those who, being often reproved, are suddenly destroyed. So those to whom the Gospel is preached have often been warned—by every affliction, every providence, every death, every sermon. And if these warnings are unheeded, God may say, at last, "Because I have called and ye refused," etc. (Prov. i. 24-33.) 2. *She perished by a look.* The city looked beautiful as ever when the sun rose upon it on that fatal day. That was the deceitful calm before the storm. She had sufficient energy of purpose to leave Sodom, but not enough to leave it altogether. Thus many go far towards obeying God, but not far enough. Lost by a look! Heaven and hell in a single glance of the eye. Eve looked at the tempting tree and brought sin and sorrow to our race. The Israelites looked at the brazen serpent and obtained life. Lot looked forward to Zoar to find safety;

his wife back to Sodom to find destruction. One of the dying thieves looked on Christ and obtained eternal life; the other looked from him and died without repentance. 3. *She perished after she had stood long, and had enjoyed great advantages.* This woman had known Abraham, had the benefits of his pious counsel and of his high example. Angels had come to her habitation. She was now actually outside of the city on which the stroke of doom was about to fall. Thus she failed at the last hour. There is no period at which our caution and vigilance can be safely relaxed. We must feel our dependance upon God's grace from first to last. 4. *She illustrates the enormous influence of worldly interests and affections.* We are not distinctly told in the history why she looked back, but our Lord implies that it was from a worldly spirit. There was, also, some disbelief of the angels' message, and a want of tender solemnity and awe. Possibly she may have feared to endure the scorn and jeers of her worldly kindred should the destruction threatened not take place. The very brevity and simplicity of the record fits it all the more for manifold instruction.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 27-29.

The Righteous Man's Retrospect of God's Great Judgments.

The judgment which had long been threatened had now come. The righteous vengeance of God had overtaken the guilty inhabitants of these cities, and Abraham witnessed the scene of desolation when all was over (verse 28). The feelings which rose within him at that awful sight are those which must fill the heart of every saint when he is permitted to behold God's great judgments upon sinful men.

I. **He regards them with solemn emotion.** How terrible was the sight which met the eye of Abraham, when he rose early in the morning and looked towards Sodom! (verses 27, 28). The once fertile and smiling plains were converted into one vast furnace. The cities and their populations were involved in a ruin so complete that not a trace remained. The night before beheld them full of strong life and thoughtless dissipation; the day looked upon a scene of desolation, wherein all life had perished in the sharp agony of the fiery flood. Abraham could not regard without emotion so utter a destruction, and especially as he had taken such an interest in his people as to use all his power with God to save them from the threatened doom. He contemplated this terrible sight—1. *With profound awe.* He had waited anxiously for the result of his pleading with God for these sinners. He may have indulged a hope that the Lord would relent at the last—that His pity would prevail, or dispose Him to find a remedy. Now he discovers that his prayers have not availed to stay judgment. This swiftness and certainty of the Divine retribution must have filled his soul with awe. 2. *With some pain to personal feelings.* Abraham was a tender and benevolent man, and he could not have witnessed the sight of so many human beings hurried into swift destruction without some shock to his better feelings. It is not always easy for a good man to sympathise with God in His terrible judgments upon sinners. Appearances, in the divine government, are often against our notions of justice. It is with difficulty that we can attain to that unquestioning loyalty which meekly submits, and acknowledges the righteousness of all God's ways. It is said, by way of reproach, that the saints, satisfied and comfortable in their own security, look down with indifference upon the fate of sinners, and even enjoy their bliss the more by the sense of contrast. But, in fact, the real tendency of their hearts is otherwise. They bring themselves with difficulty to adore the unsearchable judgments of God. They naturally recoil from the spectacle of multitudes overwhelmed by pain and calamity. Abraham must, at this moment, have felt some yearnings of tenderness towards those who perished in this wholesale destruction. But if a man trusts wholly in God, such a sight must dissipate much false pity and false hope. The sure judgments of God will overtake the wicked, notwithstanding all our pity and hope.

II. **He is satisfied with the righteousness of God as seen in them.** Through all his history, since he was first called to a life of faith and obedience, Abraham was the friend of God, in His confidence, and yielding himself entirely to Him. He had the deep conviction that the Judge of all the earth would do right. The eye of his faith was still on God, and he was content. He knew that God would be clear when He is judged. All good men will, at length, feel satisfaction that the right is done.

III. **He has some compensations in regard to them.** There was some element of consolation for Abraham. The whole case was not so bad as it might have been. Some were delivered. The intercession of Abraham had availed, though not so far as he had once hoped. Lot and his family were saved by his prayers, and not for their own righteousness. "God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow." All depended upon the power of this one righteous life. So we are saved, not for any good thing in ourselves, but by the intercession of Christ who is the elect of God. Christ prays for us when we forget to pray for ourselves, or, at best, do so but languidly. He rescues us when we are but half alive to our danger.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 27. Even when we have poured out our full souls in prayer for others, we may well be anxious regarding the result.

Here, again, Abraham comes into view in the narrative. It was daybreak when Lot came to Zoar. And about the same time Abraham, who was in Mamre, near Hebron, went to the place where he had interceded with the Covenant angel for Sodom. This point, as we observed on the spot, commands a view of that region from the heights of Hebron.—(*Jacobus.*)

The history returns continually to Abraham to show us how God's purpose of redemption through the Messiah was moving on towards accomplishment.

Abraham rose early the next morning, full of anxiety, and turned his eyes towards Sodom and Gomorrah, now only one molten sea of fire. He contemplated the melancholy scene before him, and felt with how fearful and solemn a gaze he should look upon the miseries and punishments of those who do not fear God. It was then Abraham began secretly to understand the mystery of God's will and dealings with man; it was then the agonising suspicion of God's justice, with which he had wrestled, found its solution. Lot was saved, the righteous were not destroyed with the wicked. The strange mystery of this hard, cruel, unintelligible world became plain; and the voice of his inmost heart told him, "All is right." This, then, explains these two magnificent contradictions, which, taken separately, are unintelligible, but which together form the basis of our faith. "God is love," but "our God is a consuming fire."—(*Robertson.*)

Verse 28. It is not unlikely that frequent flashes of fire were intermixed with the clouds of smoke that rolled up from the scene of the devastation. The view must have been awful beyond description, and from its terrific features is no doubt made the Scriptural type of hell, which, in allusion to the fate of Sodom, is called "the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." (Comp. also Deut. xxix. 23; Isa. xiii. 19; Jer. xlix. 18; Jude 7;

2 Peter ii. 6.) The destruction of the spiritual Sodom (Rev. xviii., xix.) is moreover evidently described, especially where the bewailing spectators are represented as standing afar off and gazing at the smoke of her burning; a circumstance, doubtless, drawn from Abraham here standing at a distance and witnessing the doom of the devoted cities.—(*Bush.*)

Those may perish for whom many prayers have been offered.

Nothing else was now to be seen of that fair and fruitful plain. *Sic transit gloria mundi.* When we most greedily grasp earthly things we embrace nothing but smoke, which brings tears from our eyes, and soon vanisheth into nothing.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 29. God bears the prayers of His people long in memory, though He may not answer them according to the extent or to the way of their desire.

One righteous man may be delivered by the intercessions of another. God helps us through human mediators in order that we might learn to trust in the Great Mediation.

God makes haste to relieve the anxieties of His servants. When Abraham saw the smoke of the country as the smoke of a furnace, it seemed that all was lost. But he is soon comforted by finding that some dear to him are safe.

The righteous are only saved by the much-prevailing power of the Great Intercessor.

This rescue is attributed to Elohim, and not to "Jehovah," the Covenant God, because Lot was severed from His guidance and care on his separation from Abraham. The fact, however, is repeated here for the purpose of connecting it with an event in the life of Lot of great significance to the future history of Abraham's seed.—(*Keil* and *Delitzsch.*)

The Eternal is here designated by the name Elohim, the Everlasting, because in the war of elements in which the cities were overwhelmed, the eternal potencies of His nature were signally displayed.—(*Murphy.*)

It is delightful to know that the world, sunk and fallen as it is, is not a neglected province of God's dominions, that it is not abandoned of its Author, and left, like a sea-weed, to float at random over the dark and shoreless ocean of uncertainty and doubt. The Christian knows no such Deity as Chance and Fate. He knows that events occur in a manner too regular for the agency of chance, but in a manner not stated and regular enough to have blind Fatality for their Author. He knows that the very notion of Providence implies design, and in Divine Providence design must extend to everything. We must either exclude God's Providence from having a share in the government of the world, or we must believe that His superintending agency extends to all events of human life. We may be sure that God governs the world in a way worthy of Him, and extends His care to all His creatures, and to all their actions. Hence the deliverance of individuals is not a lucky escape—a thing merely happening, which might have been otherwise. When the first-born of Egypt were destroyed the first-born of Israel were spared. When Jericho was levelled to the ground Rahab was delivered from the ruin. When God destroyed the cities of the plain, He saved Lot because He remembered Abraham. This man was saved by God's set purpose and design. This text shows us—

I. The terrors of God's justice towards the world of the ungodly. Two of the Apostles regard the fact here related as an example of the conduct of the Divine government towards sinners in every age—as a kind of type and pattern of God's displeasure against sin and the certainty of its punishment. (Jude 7; 2 Peter ii. 6-9.) We are not to consider it merely as an historical incident in which we have no more interest than we have in the destruction of Carthage; but we are to regard it as designed to teach us the certain overthrow of all evil, and the wretched doom of the impenitent. *The destruction of the Cities of the Plain is illustrative of the certain perdition of ungodly men.* This was a judgment immediately inflicted by the hand of God, though natural agencies were employed. Fuller says, "If so it were, God's hand was in it, directing and timing its operations, no less than if it were accomplished without the interference of any second cause." This history illustrates the awful condition of those who have God for an enemy. His enemies are always in His power. The universe is His prison. Flight or escape must be alike impossible when His patience can hold out no longer, and He sends forth the summons for destruction. "There is no darkness or shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." In vain they boast of their riches, their grandeur, their long exemption from punishment. Nothing can defend them when the hour of judgment arrives. God can arm every element against them; the *fire* shall burn the cities of the plain, the *waters* shall drown the men of the old world, the *air* shall breed pestilence, the *earth* shall tremble and rend asunder beneath their feet, the *heavens* shall send forth the dreadful thunders and bolts of fire, and the stars in their courses shall fight against Sisera. "Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord." And, "if these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" If these sparks of vengeance reach us here in the day of mercy, what must be the punishment prepared for the ungodly!

II. The triumph of God's mercy towards the children of His love. St. Peter quotes the deliverance of Lot as an example of God's ability to save the righteous, as well as of His determination to punish the wicked. God "delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked" (2 Pet. ii. 7). This example is quoted to show that "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the ungodly out of temptation." God's regard towards the righteous man is also seen in His remembering Abraham. He remembered the intercession of that holy man, and knew that though Lot was not mentioned by name he was still the object of his earnest solicitude. Lot could not pray for himself, because he did not know of the approach of the calamity; but Abraham prayed for him, and that prayer availed much. How much more shall the intercession of Christ prevail for the subjects of His grace. "If any man sin, we have an Advocate," etc. (1 John ii. 1). God allows mediation to prevail with Him. Thus Job was heard when he prayed for his friends, Moses when he made intercession for Israel, that they might not be blotted out of the book of life. Lot owed his preservation to God's regard for Abraham. As Lot's family was preserved for Lot's sake, so Lot himself was preserved for Abraham's sake. And in a far higher sense, a lost world is recovered and redeemed for Christ's sake. The history of Lot's escape illustrates our deliverance by the power of Divine grace, the whole of which must be ascribed entirely to God. *He originates the plan of salvation.* It was not Lot who sought the angels, but the angels who sought him. And "by grace ye are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Mercy framed the scheme of deliverance, revealed the Refuge hoped for, implanted the principle of grace in the heart: and mercy maintains the vigour of that principle in spite of all the opposition of earth and hell. God's mercy gives the pardon, and the way to find it, and the hand to receive it, and the eye to search it, and the heart to desire it. In this instance, as in many more, God was found of them who sought Him not. He sent His angel to warn him of the unsuspected danger, to reveal the appointed place of refuge, to arouse him to immediate activity and solicitude. Also we learn that *God overcomes the hindrances and obstacles to salvation which arise in our minds.* The angels hastened Lot, and lingering nature requires the hand of special grace to save it from destruction. Even in the best men, how many obstacles are there to their own salvation! How much must be overcome before grace has it all its own way!—our pride, our indolence, our worldliness, our unbelief, our self-sufficiency, our tendency to procrastination and delay. God has various means of bringing men to Himself, of rousing them from their sloth, and of directing them in the path of safety and of life. Sickness, pain, disappointments, sorrows, losses, death, the bereavements of friends, the accidents of life,—what are these but so many voices saying, "Up, get ye out of this place?" What are they but so many angel hands laying hold on the lingerer, and setting him in the path of salvation? Let sinners consider that while they are lingering, time is hastening, eternity is advancing, judgment is approaching, evil habits are growing stronger, and the chances of rescue from danger are diminishing day by day. But when once we submit to God—to His plan of deliverance, *He will surely bring us to the rest and the refuge which He has prepared for us.* In the day of calamity He will remember us for good.

THE FOLLY OF SEEKING OUR OWN CHOICE.—*Verse* 30.

Lot was bidden to go to the mountain, but requested that he might be allowed to seek refuge in Zoar. In his request he was graciously indulged—allowed to make the experiment which was to convince him of his folly in choosing for himself. We only land ourselves in greater difficulties when we act according to the suggestions of our own human wisdom in opposition to the Divine will. Of such conduct we observe,—

I. The root of it is unbelief. Lot could not trust God fully, and therefore the infinite charity of God stooped to his infirmity. Perfect faith takes God at His word without questioning or hesitation, without clipping His commands to our own notions of duty, or resolving to venture less than He requires. We must trust in God with *our whole heart*, and *lean not to our own understanding*. Our faith falls short in so far as we seek to modify the commands of duty by our own wilfulness. Imperfect obedience has its bitter root in unbelief. In the instance of Lot, we see the sad consequences of this timid and imperfect faith. Here we trace the source of the *inconsistency* and *vacillation* of his character. Our walk in the path of life and obedience is only steady and sure in proportion as our faith is clear and strong.

II. We are made bitterly to repent of it. "He feared to dwell in Zoar." He was afraid that the destruction would overtake him even there. That spirit of unbelief which renders our obedience imperfect brings dread. We take alarm, for conscience tells us we have left some ground for fear. We have not been perfectly honest and open with God, and we justly expect that we shall smart for it. That perfect love alone which fully confides can cast out all fear. A dreadful penalty is visited upon unbelief when it leads to the total loss of faith, when a man is reduced to that state in which he can believe nothing. To commence following God's command, and then to impair our obedience by our own foolish will, leads in the end to doubt and uncertainty—to that sense of insecurity in which we feel that nothing is sure and safe.

III. We may be compelled to accept God's way at last. Lot finds refuge, at length, in the *mountain*, where he had been ordered to go at first. A merciful Providence brought him up to the full measures of his duty. He finds, in the end, that it is best to fall in with God's plan. By a painful discipline we are often brought round to God's way, and made to feel that what He chooses is best.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSE.

The sight of a sea of waters accumulating in the vale, and gradually approaching the very borders of Zoar, was not a little calculated to inspire terror How could he know where it would stop? at what point the Most High would say. "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." If this were the real cause of his flight, his betaking himself to the mountain would be a very natural step. But the history shows that the rash counsels which good men adopt under the dictation of fleshly wisdom or passion are never attended with prosperous issues. They may appear to succeed in the outset, and their authors may for a time bless themselves in a fond conceit of the happiest results, but eventually the truth of the Divine declaration will be experienced, "Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of Me." (Isa. xxxi. 1.) But why did not Lot return to Abraham? Perhaps the most probable supposition is, that he was too proud to do this. He left him prosperous; but he must return, if he return at all, poor and degraded, and an outcast. This was too severe a trial for his spirit as a man, and he had rather incur new dangers than submit to it. Whatever were his reasons, he seems to have made a bad choice, and "forsaken his own mercies."—*(Bush.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 31-38.

THE LESSONS OF LOT'S DISHONOUR.

This chapter closes with the sad picture of a good man betrayed into sin, and thus covering his name with dishonour. It is a painful history, but there are some lessons of instruction to be learned.

I. **That saints who have been the subjects of extraordinary mercy may yet fall into sin.** The temporal deliverance of Lot was a special act of Divine mercy. His conviction of it depended upon no mere emotion. There was the outward fact in which he could distinctly trace the hand of God. Yet, after so distinct a favour of Providence, he falls by an easy temptation into the foulest sin. Thus God's mercy is no guarantee for human gratitude. Those who have been saved, yet so as by fire, are often the very first to forget God their Saviour. The picture which the Bible gives of man is faithful to the facts of human nature. God merciful, but man ungrateful. God just, but man unrighteous. God true, but every man a liar.

II. **That it is difficult, even for the best, to escape the effect of evil associations.** The conduct of Lot's daughters shows how much they were imbued with the spirit of evil around them, notwithstanding their pious parentage. It is difficult for goodness to stand upright in the land of wickedness. Lot's spiritual character suffered less injury than that of his family from their sojourn in Sodom; yet his moral sense was blunted, his moral fibre relaxed. As there is said to be virtue and healing in the shadow of goodness falling upon us, so the shadow of evil spreads nought but what is baneful.

III. **The folly of a worldly choice.** Lot had chosen this place with a view of promoting his temporal prosperity, but at what a cost! He had nearly perished in the terrible judgments which fell upon its population. He is scarcely saved. Mercy had to snatch him out of the fire. By choosing this world, against his best spiritual interests, he had exposed himself to bodily danger; and, what is worse than this, to great impairment of his spiritual health and vigour. We run the greatest risk to our souls when worldly considerations are uppermost in our minds in choosing our path in life.

IV. **The wisdom of avoiding the occasions of sin.** Lot gave way to strong drink, and then committed the sin of incest. There is a special danger in all sins of the flesh, for, when once indulged in, they render easier sins of deeper dye. They dull the intellect and the conscience until all moral perceptions are weakened and confused. If we allow the animal man the mastery, the spiritual man is threatened. How much of the sin, degradation, and misery of mankind is to be traced to strong drink! "Intoxication deceived Lot, who was not deceived in Sodom; the flames of lust burn him whom flames of sulphur did not burn." *(Gregory I.)* "Lot, who in Sodom, the very school of unchastity, had lived chastely, in the cave was guilty of incest, suffering shipwreck in the harbour." *(Lange.)* The occasions of sin—especially those of a fleshly nature—should be avoided, or else we venture upon a current which will, in the end, become too strong for us.

V. The awful depths of human depravity. All sin is evil, but there are sins which defile the whole body and reveal depths of human depravity, from the very thought of which pure minds shrink with pain. There are fleshly sins of so deep a stain that the common fault and corruption of human nature is almost pure by comparison with them. This view of specially degrading sins is confirmed by the usages of language, by which the term "sinner" is applied to a special class. Such sins tend to hurry a man along that path which leads to infamy and shame.

VI. Fleshly sins cover even a fair name with dishonour. Lot is never mentioned in the history after this circumstance. He disappears under a cloud. A blot lies on his memory for all generations. He is now both outwardly and inwardly separated from Abraham, and is of no further importance in the history of salvation. His sin may have been forgiven, and his person accepted, but the deeds themselves are recorded in the iron page, where they remain. They are *things done*, and cannot be altered. They are happier and more blest who have not greatly fallen, even though the mercy of God is not overtasked by the worst sins of mankind.

VII. The danger of excitement. Lot had witnessed alarming scenes. It was a time of wild excitement when he knew not where to look for rest, and fears were in the way—destruction all around him, his wife stricken down at his side by an awful judgment, he himself a wanderer, having no certain dwelling-place, and not strong in the inspiration of hope. It is a time of great spiritual danger when a man is recovering from the extreme tension of his mind, produced by the excitement of violent and conflicting feelings.

VIII. The faithfulness of the Scripture record. Sacred history records the faults of its good men with a wonderful faithfulness. Here are no impossible characters, no ideal personages created by human imagination, but never seen in actual flesh and blood. The facts of human nature are accepted, though the contemplation of them may be painful and sad. We have men as they are, and not written up to by the devices of literary art. No human story-teller would have forged such a narrative as this. It has all the marks of a truthful record. The gravest sins and faults of the righteous are not concealed.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 32-36. The manners of Sodom here obtrude themselves upon our view. Lot's daughters might seem to have been led to this unnatural project, first, because they thought the human race extinct with the exception of themselves, in which case their conduct may have seemed a work of justifiable necessity; and next, because the degrees of kindred within which it was unlawful to marry had not been determined by an express law. But they must have seen some of the inhabitants of Zoar after the destruction of the cities; and carnal intercourse between parent and offspring must have always been repugnant to nature.—*(Murphy).*

Kalisch well remarks, "No word is employed, no allusion made, in the whole of this tale to express disgust, aversion, or hatred: the laws concerning the allowed and forbidden degrees were not yet fixed: Abraham himself lived in a matrimony cursed as an abomination in the Mosaic code (Lev. xviii. 9): the event is related with all the calmness of historical composition." And it must also not be forgotten that in Deut. ii. 9–19, the possessions of the "children of Lot" in Ar and in the land of Ammon are recognised by God, and the Israelites are forbidden to distress or meddle with them. But at the same time the necessity which there was for bereaving Lot of his self-command, shows us beneath the surface that his "righteous soul," even though it could brook much which nature now abhors (verse 8), could not have been brought to consent to that into which he was unconsciously betrayed.—*(Alford.)*

It is a moral duty to take care of our physical nature and to preserve it in its integrity. Whatever confuses the understanding, or weakens the will, exposes to moral danger. Hence drunkenness leads men into crimes from which, in their sober senses, they would shrink in abhorrence. All that which rouses the beast within us tends to destroy our better nature.

Those carnal devices by which morality is strained to meet circumstances show a practical distrust in Providence.

Verses 37, 38. Both these names justify the veiw that it was merely *to preserve the family* that the daughters of Lot had recourse to the expedient. Hence, as we do not find that they ever *repeated* the stratagem, so neither do they now appear to have been at all ashamed of it, both which would have been natural had their motives been more unworthy than they were. The offspring, however, of this incestuous connection, whatever may be said in behalf of the connection itself, was certainly a *bad* one. These Moabites soon fell from the faith of God, and became idolators, the worshippers of Chemosh and Baal-peor, and were enemies to the children of Abraham. The same is also true of the Ammonites. As both these make afterwards a considerable figure in the sacred history, the inspired writer takes care to introduce at this early period an account of their *origin*.—(*Bush.*)

In the worst races there is an element of hope. Ruth was a Moabitess, and was a member of that family through whom the Messiah came. The prophetic Scriptures give us a picture of the conversion of the Moabites to Christ. (Isa. xi. 14; Jer. xlviii. 47; Dan. xi. 41.) The golden age for mankind lies in the future, not in the past.

CHAPTER XX.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Kadesh; Shur; Gerar.]** All lying near the southern borders of Canaan. Gerar was the chief city of the Philistines It is now called *Khirbet-el-Gerar*, *i.e.*, the ruins of Gerar. The site is still pointed out near Gaza, where traces of the ancient city remain. **2. Abimelech.]** *Father of the king.* Probably the standing title of the kings of Gerar. *Took Sarah*, *i.e.*, into his harem. **3. Behold, thou art but a dead man.]** "Thou art dying, or on the point of dying, if thou persist. A deadly plague was already in the body of Abimelech, on account of Sarah." *(Murphy.)* Perhaps it was merely intended that he was dead as regards *progeny* (Ver. 17.) **5. In the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands.]** *Heb.* "In the perfection, sincerity, or simplicity of my heart," etc. Comp. Psa. xxvi. 6; lxxiii. 18. **7. He is a prophet.]** One who speaks on behalf of God. "Enoch had prophesied before this, as we learn from Jude, and Noah had uttered a prophetic blessing; but Abraham is the first one in the O.T. who is called a prophet." *(Jacobus.)* *He shall pray for thee.* Intercession was a special work of prophets. (Jer. xxvii. 18. Compare also Jer. xiv. 11; xv. 1.) **8. Servants.]** Court officers—his counsellors. (1 Kings i. 2, x. 5; 2 Kings vi. 8.) **10. What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?]** "What purpose hadst thou in view—what could have been thy motive?" **13. God caused me to wander.]** One of the rare instances in which the *plural* verb is used with the name God, itself in the plural form. "If the verb be plural, it is only an instance of the literal meaning of Elohim, the Eternal Supernatural Powers, coming into view." *(Murphy.)* **16. Behold he is unto thee for a covering of the eyes.]** *Heb.* "Lo, it is to thee as a covering of the eyes." "Not, as some imagine, a *veil*, understanding the present as money to buy one: but it is rather a *peace-offering* in consideration of the damage done to them. 'To cover one's face' is the *Heb.* idiom for causing one to forget a wrong done. (Ch. xxxii. 20, 21.) '*I will cover his face*,' i.e., I will appease him with a present. (Job. ix. 24.) So, also, to cover sin is to pardon—to see it no more." *(Jacobus.)* *Thus she was reproved.* *Heb.* *So thou art judged*, i.e., justice has been done to thee. "The original of this is most naturally taken as a part of Abimelech's speech, and then it is to be translated, *And all this that thou mayest be righted*. All this had been done or given, that the injury to Sarah may be redressed." *(Murphy.)* He had now made amends for all that had happened. **17. God healed Abimelech.]** This may explain in what sense he was on the point of dying (ver. 3), that he was to be considered dead, as regards progeny. *His wife*, i.e., she who was eminently such—the queen. *Maid servants.* Concubines are intended, a different word being used for ordinary servants. (1 Sam. xxv. 41.) *And they bare.* They were rendered capable of procreating children. The verb is masculine, for both sexes were involved in this judicial malady. It may be that this was inflicted with the design of preserving the purity of Sarah. Abimelech was not suffered to touch her. (Ver. 6). **18. For the Lord had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech.]** "To be taken with reference to both sexes. God had visited all with incapacity, which visitation was now removed." *(Alford.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-7.

ABRAHAM'S REPETITION OF HIS OLD FAULT: THE POWER OF FORMER TEMPTATIONS.

I. Their power may slumber long. Twenty-four years had passed away since Abraham committed this same fault. He then distrusted the king and people of Egypt, as he does Abimelech in this instance. One would have thought that so long an experience of such extraordinary favours, on the part of God, would have so strengthened the faith of Abraham as to make him superior to all temptations which imply distrust in his Divine Director. He must have seen, by this time, that God had a way of deliverance when all human resources were at an end; and, therefore, that all carnal expedients were vain. Surely, the temptation to employ devices which had been proved to fail would now have no power over him! But this incident teaches us that the force of this old temptation was not destroyed, but only slumbered for awhile. We are never safe from the invasion of temptations which have once vanquished us. They have discovered our weak part, and this must always be a source of danger—a chronic infirmity of the soul which is but imperfectly healed.

II. Circumstances may arise which will revive their strength. Abraham was again placed in similar circumstances to those in which he had once fallen, and the old temptation assaults him with all its former strength. Science considers two kinds of energy, one in which it is active, and the other potential. The energy of a cannon ball is active: we can see the effects of it; but the energy of a heavy body in an elevated position, or that which slumbers in gunpowder, is *potential*. There it is, though to all appearance most harmless; and by fitting means can in a moment be called into action. Such is the power of old temptations. They watch us like a tiger his prey, silently and in ambush, and then spring upon us in an unguarded moment. In the particular instance of Abraham there were several causes which, at this time, contributed to render him weak against the assault of his old temptation. 1. *Reaction after great spiritual excitement.* He had seen that terrible instance of God's judgment upon the cities of the plain—his kinsman scarcely saved—silence, desolation, and death reigning over a land once beautiful and full of busy life. The sight of these things must have filled his heart with conflicting emotions. The kind of excitement hence arising may strengthen the soul, but it is that intermittent strength which is succeeded by intervals of depression. Hence it is that retirement and watchfulness are most necessary at such times. The soul is too weak to trust herself abroad—to go out into the open field of conflict. The man out of whom Jesus had cast the devils wished to continue with Him. He was transported with joy and gratitude—in a most excited state of feeling, and ready to make any sacrifice. But Jesus discouraged his over-confident zeal, and told him that a state of retirement, the quiet and obscure ways of life, would be best for him. "Return to thy own house, and show how great things God hath done unto thee." (Luke viii. 38, 39.) 2. *Experience of social corruption.* Abraham had seen all around him the worst forms of wickedness. He might well be tempted to consider that no truth, no high justice, could be due to those who were so irrecoverably bad. Such crooked ways of iniquity could only be combated by the cunning of the serpent. Abraham thought that the people were extremely wicked, and devoid of all religious thought and feeling. (Ver. 11.) He was under the temptation that he must not deal with them upon high principle and an open sincerity. Thus the very corruptions of mankind are dangerous to the virtues of saints. Besides, Abraham might reflect that he had escaped out of his former difficulty in Egypt with little hurt to himself, perhaps advantage, on the whole. The scheme had succeeded once—at least it had brought him no real damage—and why should he not try it again? The experience of long years had not shown him that mankind was growing better; it rather seemed as if corruption was increasing more and more. The state of society was such as to tempt even a righteous man to renounce ideal truth and integrity, and employ a compromised or qualified veracity.

III. The results of yielding again are most disastrous. Abraham found to his sorrow that his policy did not succeed, but only brought him into trouble. 1. *The distress of anxiety.* After Abraham had made the representation that Sarah was his sister, how anxious he must have been as to the success of that device in giving them both any real protection. Carnal policies of this kind, while on trial, fill men with anxiety, and should they fail they bring confusion. Whatever is of doubtful virtue may well make us anxious, however good the end may be after which we seek. 2. *Possible loss to ourselves.* There is always some *moral* loss. But we may suffer *temporal* loss. That very good thing for which Abraham contrived—the safety of his wife—he failed to secure. It would have been better for him had he trusted in God, and left all events with Him. It is only by *faith* that we can fight an honourable and successful battle with the world, for the moment we attempt to fight the world with its own weapons we lose dignity and ensure failure. We must conduct this strife "lawfully." 3. *The shame of reproof from worldly men.* (Verses 9, 10, 16.) There are men of the world possessed of some strong moral principles, of great natural sagacity, and who are therefore keen to discover faults in others. They expect consistency in those who make a high profession, and are not sparing in indignant censure when they do not find it. When they catch a saint of God using doubtful means they quickly assume a moral superiority, and thus put him to shame.

IV. Those who fall under them are only delivered by the special interference of God. Through all his faults God had a regard unto His servant. He was still His "prophet," the interpreter of His will, the intercessor with Him on behalf of sinful men. He was the representative of faith in a faithless world; and, according to the flesh, the beginning of that line along which God's purpose of love and mercy should move towards full accomplishment. Therefore God had a special regard unto him, and miraculously interfered to preserve him from the consequences of his fault. God always deals the same way, in principle, with His tried servants. 1. *The infirmities of believers appeal to the Divine compassion.* God knows the strength of our temptations, the difficulty we have to stand upright in this sinful world. He has regard unto those who have fought bravely against its evils, who have striven hard to obey their heavenly calling. He will put a difference between those whose faith shows occasional infirmity and weakness, and those in whom faith is wanting altogether. The attainments and habits of a life of godliness help the soul to return after the lapses of her infirmity. They appeal to the compassion of God, who is not unmindful of His former mercies. If, as the God of nature, He has regard to the work of His hands, surely, as the God of grace, He will have regard to the work of His new creation. 2. *God is concerned to maintain the promises made to faith.* A son was promised to Abraham who was to perpetuate the race from which Messiah should spring. The time of fulfilment was now drawing so near that Abraham by his conduct, in this instance, was endangering that promise. But God was guiding all events, and accomplishing His will and purpose. The interests of a magnificent future had to be considered as well as those which belonged personally to Abraham. Promises were made to the patriarch's faith, and God delivered him for His honour. And even in the case of saints whose lives are obscure, and who are not called to take the chief parts in history, yet so many important interests are bound up in them, that the Divine grace is rich in resources to complete their salvation.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES

Verse 1. Abraham removed from the doomed district, for it was painful for him to look upon the desolations of God's anger. The contemplation of acts of Divine judgment is awful and terrible, even though our faith in the righteousness of them may be strong.

Abraham journeyed from thence, either as grieved at the sight of Sodom, or as annoyed by the ill air thereof, or as loathing Lot's incest, or driven out by famine, or desirous of doing good to many. Whatever it was that occasioned his removal, we find him ever and anon journeying from one place and sojourning in another. God's people are a brood of travellers. This was Abram the Hebrew, of Heber, which signifieth pilgrim or stranger. They look towards Heaven as their home, as Ulysses is said to do towards Ithaca, as a bird looks to her nest on the highest rocks. —(*Trapp*).

He had now sojourned many years in the Plains of Mamre (ch. xiii. 18, xviii. 1), and he had seen much of the Lord's goodness, as well as of the Lord's terror, there. But still greater things await him ere his pilgrimage finally closes. The last stage of his earthly journey is to be the most signally blessed and the most remarkably tried of all. He passes, therefore, now into a new scene, where, in new circumstances, he is to see the salvation of God.—(*Candlish*).

Verse 2. Lies that are not altogether such, but have some truth mixed up with them, are the most dangerous to the interests of mankind.

It is impossible to acquit Abraham of the sin of gross unbelief. For the space of twenty-five years he had experienced the faithfulness and loving-kindness of his God. He had recently received the promise that he should have a son by Sarah, who should be the progenitor of the Messiah. But on coming to Gerar, his heart fails him for fear that the people will kill him in order to gain possession of his wife. This was a practical distrust in the protection of Jehovah. In what had God failed him that he should begin now to doubt of His faithfulness and power? Besides, it ought to have occurred to him that he had once before been guilty of the same dissimulation, and had been reproved for it. The repetition of so gross an offence, after such a warning and such a deliverance, increased its sinfulness a hundredfold.—(*Bush*).

How difficult it is, even for the best

of saints, to forego the suggestions and guiding of their own wisdom and to trust entirely in God!

The calamity from which Abraham sought to shield his wife by sinful evasion fell upon her. Thus was he chastened for his evil counsel. All devices arising from practical distrust in God must fail, and bring their penalties upon all who have recourse to them.

This is the second time he thus sinned. So Jehoshaphat was twice taken tardy in Ahab's amity (2 Chron. xix. 2; xx. 37); Jonah twice reproved for rebellion; and John, for angel-worship; Samson, twenty years after he had loved the Philistine woman, goes down to Gaza, and went into Delilah (Judges xv. 20; xvi. 1). But what shall we say to that example of the Apostles (Luke xxii. 24), amongst whom "there was a strife who should be accounted the greatest?" And this was not the first, but the third time they had thus offended by ambition. But the last time most unseasonably, after that He had foretold His passion to follow within two days. See the incredible perverseness of corrupt nature! How strongly do the best still smell of the old cask, taste of the old stock, though ingrafted into Christ, and though poured from vessel to vessel (John v. 14). "And this have ye done again," saith the Lord (Mal. ii. 13). A great aggravation, as numbers added to numbers, are first ten times more, and then a hundred, and then a thousand. "How oft did they provoke Him in the wilderness, and grieve Him in the desert" (Psa. lxxviii. 40).—*(Trapp.)*

Verse 3. The crisis was serious, and worthy of the special interference of God. Miracles are not recorded in Scripture as having been performed on frivolous occasions, as if intended merely to astonish. God interposes when the time is momentous.

The evil that men propose to do has often a gracious issue, for God interferes that He may prevent sin. We know not how much of the Divine dealings with men have this special object in view.

In the night sleep, the spirit of revelation comes nearer to the heathen, as is shown in the dreams of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar. It is a medium of revelation also for children (Joseph, in the old covenant), and for labourers with the hand (Joseph, in the new covenant); and the prophetic disposition, enduring into the night or extending itself through its hours (Isaac, Jacob, Paul). Moreover, Pharaoh's butler and baker (ch. xl. 8); the Midianites (Judges vii. 13–15); the wife of Pilate (Matt. xxvii. 19, compare Wisdom xviii. 17–19), had significant dreams.—*(Lange.)*

Evil is overruled for good. Abraham's fault procured for Abimelech the advantage of a Divine visitation; which, though marked by severity, was kind in intent and issue.

The king thought he was innocent, but God interposed to show the true bearing of his conduct. So Saul on his way to Damascus thought he was doing God service, but the Divine voice suddenly alarmed him with a view of the real tendency and meaning of the act in which he was engaged.

Man's wisdom leads him into a pit, and God's wisdom must draw him out. *(Fuller.)*

Verse 4. How carefully are all the essential particulars regarding the genealogy of the Messiah preserved in the sacred records! The Holy Spirit marks this fact lest anyone should say that Isaac was the son of Abimelech.

Wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? A reference, probably, to the recent event of Sodom's overthrow, which must have greatly impressed the surrounding country. It is as if he had said, "I am aware that thou hast slain a nation notorious for its filthy and unnatural crimes, but we are not such a nation, and in the present case all that has been done was done in perfect ignorance; surely thou wilt not slay the innocent as if they were guilty." The language evidently carries with it the implication, which is abundantly warranted elsewhere in the Scripture, that from the close connection existing between them the sins of rulers were often visited upon their people. See this illustrated in the case of David (1 Chron. xxi. 14, 17).—(*Bush.*)

A heathen king knows how to address the Supreme. Thus the knowledge of the true God had not at this time entirely perished from among the Gentiles.

Verse 5. The servants of God stand reproved by a heathen king.

Abimelech vindicates his conduct by undeniable facts which (to say the least) partly justify it.

With this example before us it is not too much to believe that some among the heathen live according to the dictates of conscience.

The saints of God often fail in those very graces and virtues for which they are the most remarkable. Abraham was famous for his faith, and Sarah for not being "afraid with any amazement" (1 Pet. iii. 6), and yet they both manifest distrust and fear.

Verse 6. God admits the integrity of this heathen king. He had not committed that foul crime of which he was here in danger. Men who, as regards the whole law of God, are sinners, may yet be innocent of some particular forms of transgression.

1. The reason why he could yet claim innocence of "the great transgression" was God's restraining power and grace. 2. What a hell on earth would there be but for God's various restraints in conscience, the Scripture, the Church, the civil law, education, and society, and, most of all, the Holy Ghost. 3. How thankful should every man be for God's restraints. 4. What infinite need have we of a Saviour from sin.

Augustine says: "We see a sin is done *against God* when it is in the eyes of men of small moment, because they treat lightly mere sins of the flesh." (Psa. li. 3.)—(*Jacobus.*)

Who that knows anything of his own heart is not conscious that he has at some times tampered with sin, and laid such snares for his own feet that nothing but God's grace and unlooked-for interference has preserved him!—(*Bush.*)

Verse 7. Wrong may be done even when we have not reached the limit of actual transgression.

We are only safe when we cut off the occasion of sin, and place ourselves in the condition of the least danger.

Abimelech had sinned against one who was the ambassador of the Heavenly King—both the aggravation of his offence and the ground of his hope of pardon.

Life and death hang upon our treatment of the message of God's prophets.

As with every sacrifice there was incense, so should every ministerial duty be performed with prayer. St. Paul begins his epistles with prayer, and proceeds and ends in like manner. What is it that he would have every one of his Epistles stamped with his own hand, but prayer for all his people! (2 Thess. iii. 17, 18.)—(*Trapp.*)

Abraham is here designated by the Lord a prophet. This is a step in advance of all his previous spiritual attainments. A prophet is God's spokesman, who utters with authority certain of the things of God. (Ex. vii. 1; iv. 15.) This implies two things: 1. The things of God are known only to him, and therefore must be communicated by him. 2. The prophet must be enabled of God to announce in correct terms the things made known to him. These things refer not only to the future, but in general to all such matters as fall within the purpose and procedure of God. They may even include otherwise known or knowable by man, so far as these are necessary to the exposition of the Divine will. Now Abraham has heretofore received many communications from God. But this did not constitute him a prophet. It is the divinely authorised utterance of new truth which raises him to this rank. And Abraham's first exercise in prophecy is not speaking to men of

God, but to God for men. *He shall pray for thee.* The prophetic and the priestly offices go together in the Father of the Faithful. These dignities belong to him not from any absolute merit, but from his call to be the holder of the promise and the father of that seed to whom the promises were made.—(*Murphy.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8-16.

MORALITY OUTSIDE OF THE CHURCH.

The Divine call of Abraham was the first step towards the formation of the visible Church, and the interests of that Church centre in his life. He was the home of Revelation, the expositor of the known will of God. To Abimelech no Divine communication had been made. He, therefore, represents those who are *outside* the Church. All that was good in him was the product of what is called "Natural Religion." This history shows what fair and noble things of life and conduct may grow from such a soil.

I. Morality outside the Church may attain to great excellence. The conduct of Abimelech shows that men may attain to principles of virtue and righteous living who are yet beyond the pale of revelation. He represents heathen morality at its best. There is much to admire both in his thought and feeling concerning human conduct. 1. *Belief in a moral standard of right and wrong.* He did not regard human actions as indifferent, or to be determined by the mere will and caprice of the individual without any reference to their moral qualities and issues. They are to be referred to a standard, whose witness and counterpart is the law written in the heart. In his view there were "deeds that ought not to be done" (verse 9). Moral obligation is herein implied. This *ought* and *ought not* is the imperative of conscience. The action of conscience implies that there is a law existing somewhere. Though the man may be greatly ignorant, yet that faculty when awakened obeys the impulse from an unseen source. 2. *Belief in the moral relations of human society.* He knows that the welfare of nations depends upon their righteousness (verse 4). He censures the conduct of Abraham, which had nearly involved both himself and his nation in a great sin (verse 9). The members of human society are so connected together by the principle of mutual dependence, and the ties of a common interest, that the great sins of the few must affect the many. A nation cannot maintain existence without some moral bonds. 3. *A sense of injured moral feeling in the presence of wrong.* He not only recognised the moral character of actions, and held human responsibility *as a doctrine,* but also as a principle of heart and life. He felt strongly upon the subject. His moral sensibilities were wounded and outraged at the very thought of the sin which he was so near committing. 4. *A readiness to make restitution for faults committed against others* (verses 14, 15). Abimelech not only restores Abraham his wife, but gives him presents by way of atonement for any wrong he may unwittingly have done him. His high sense of justice is not content with sentiment and abstractions, but contemplates practical duty.

II. Morality outside the Church may have lessons of reproof for those who are within it. Sarah stood "reproved" (verse 16), and so did Abraham; for they had agreed together to act this part. They held to a statement which, though not altogether false, was a moral untruth—a deceit and a culpable concealment. The manly and open conduct of the heathen king reproved them. 1. *For their mean subterfuges.* This conduct was unworthy of them as persons of wealth and position, and whose previous history entitled them to respect and honour from the surrounding people. To take the lowest ground, it lacked open sincerity and manly courage. It was a mean subterfuge unworthy of noble souls. The cunning and dissembling in their conduct towards others, too often practised by professing Christians, is reproved by the more open and manly dealing of many who have enjoyed no religious advantages. 2. *Their distrust of Providence.* Surely the patriarch and his wife had sufficient proof already of the power and willingness of God to protect them, and bring them out of every danger. They imperiled the truth to prevent (as they considered) worse consequences; and thus they took refuge in a human expedient instead of trusting in God. Surely the heathen have reason to reprove us when we cannot trust our God, in whom we profess to believe, in the time of peril. In so far as we act as if we had no Divine director, we belie our profession of religion. There are actions in the life of many, who are yet true members of the Church, which really show a practical disbelief in the help and guidance of Providence. 3. *Their religious prejudices.* Abraham excuses his conduct by saying, "Because I thought; surely, the fear of God is not in this place." (Verse 11.) He considered, that those not so favoured of God as himself were without any just ideas of duty and of the purpose of life. He took it for granted that men who had no special revelation must, of necessity, be without moral principle, and not to be trusted. How incorrectly do the best of men often judge of those who are outside their own pale! Men find it hard to believe in the goodness of those whose views on the subject of religion are essentially different from their own. Some narrow-minded Christians selfishly rest in the thought that they are the special favourites of God, and form harsh and uncharitable judgments of all the rest of mankind. We have no right to limit the grace of God by confiding its operation to the Church only. The *revelation* of Christianity may be the privilege of the few, but the *dispensation* of it is intended for the benefit of all. The hindrances to the universal sway of God's truth and righteousness arise from man. His infinite goodness would bless all. His grace can raise the fruits of righteousness even where there is no open vision, and where religious minds think His fear does not exist. We are not to despise human goodness because it has not been nourished in the Church.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 8. It is wise to act promptly upon Divine warnings. 1. As they concern ourselves. Abimelech had taken a wrong step, but by the grace of God was prevented from rushing into greater evil. His was the fault, and the matter concerned himself first of all. 2. As they concern others. The king announced the fact to his household, for he could not transgress the moral law without bringing upon them also the effects of his great sin. Human interests are so related that the results of a man's sin must spread far beyond himself.

There is hope for men who are afraid of the judgments of God. It shows that their minds are fully alive to their real situation. There is a courage of open defiance which only comes of ignorance. When men begin to fear they are ready to listen to the voice of wisdom.

Nature taught infidels to take care of their own families. Socrates is said to have called philosophy down from heaven to earth; that is, to have directed men to be good at home. The malicious Pharisees could object it to our Saviour—"Thy disciples wash not," "Thy disciples fast not," etc.; as if He were much to blame for suffering such things. And surely, he is not a complete Christian, walks not "in a perfect way," that is not good "at home." (Psa. ci. 2.) The fifth commandment is called by Philo *a mixed commandment*, and made a part of the first table. It is therefore set betwixt both tables of the law, saith another, because all we get from God or men we bring it home to our houses —as Abimelech here relates his divine dream to his servants—the place of well employing it.—(*Trapp.*)

The prompt obedience of this heathen king reproves us who have greater privileges. God appeared to him only in a dream, but us He calls daily by Moses, by the prophets, by apostles, and by His only-begotten Son. Should all this convergence of testimony and spiritual force have less effect upon us than a single vision had upon this man?

Verse 9. A heathen king reproving the Father of the Faithful! The better the man who is subjected to such reproach, the more shameful the position.

The dangers of life's pilgrimage are so great that believers are tempted to adopt worldly policy and scheming for their own safety, but when such devices are discovered they bring shame and contempt.

Were we to judge simply from this portion of the sacred narrative we should be ready to think that Abraham had been the heathen and Abimelech the prophet of the Lord. In this offended king's reproof we see much to admire and to commend. Considering the injury he had sustained, and the danger to which he had been exposed, it is truly wonderful that he should express himself with such mildness and moderation. The occasion would almost have justified the bitterest reproaches; and it might well have been expected that Abimelech would cast reflections upon the partriarch's religion, condemning that as worthless or him as hypocritical. He never once complained of the punishment which he and his family had suffered, nor of the danger to which they had been exposed, but only of their seduction into sin. He considered this as the greatest injury that could have been done to him, and inquires with artless but earnest anxiety what he had done to provoke Abraham to the commission of it.—(*Bush.*)

There are moral properties belonging to human actions by which they are referred to an eternal law of right and wrong. The heathen have a conscience which pronounces upon the character of their actions.

The sense of moral obligation makes religion possible to man.

Verses 10, 11. Under the influence of fear Abraham could not see his own conduct in the right light. Abimelech now bids him consider it with the coolness and severity of reason.

Prejudice.—1. It is often strong in those who enjoy high religious privileges. Abraham thought himself so highly favoured of God that he was unwilling to admit that any goodness could be found among those who were less favoured. The pride of our superior position renders us indisposed to believe in the virtues of those who by their providential position are ignorant of the written Word. 2. The evils of it are great. (1) It limits the power of the grace of God. He can fulfil Himself in many ways and work by many methods. He is not confined to one mode of making Himself known. (2) It is a sin against charity. Charity inclines to hope for the best, and is most at home with large views. (3) It issues in committing wrong against others. Abraham greatly wronged this man. Those hasty judgments of mankind, which have their root in our own pride and self-importance, cause us to sin against others.

Could not that God who had brought him out from an idolatrous country, and preserved Lot and Melchizedek in the midst of the most abandoned people, have some "hidden ones" in Gerar also? Or, supposing that there were none who had truly feared God, must they therefore be so impious as to murder him in order to possess his wife? There can be no doubt that many who are not truly religious have well-nigh as high a sense of honour and as great an abhorrence of atrocious crimes as any converted man can feel; and therefore the reproach which he so unjustifiably cast on them returned deservedly on his own head.—(*Bush.*)

The doctrine of human depravity does not oblige us to believe that all men are vicious.

The fear of God may exist among those who have had no special revelation of His will.

The history of the first formation of the Church does not shut out hope of the salvability of the heathen.

The fear of God is the best foundation for the stability and the prosperity of nations.

The fear of God is the best curb to restrain from evil, and spur to incite to good. All honesty flows from this holy fear. It is a problem in Aristotle, why men are trusted in more than other creatures? The answer is, "Man only reverenceth God;" therefore you may trust in him, therefore you may commit yourself to him. He that truly feareth God is like unto Cato, of whom it is said, "He never did well that he might appear to do so, but because he could do no otherwise." You need not fear me, said Joseph to his brethren, for I fear God, and so dare do you no hurt. Ought ye not to have feared God? said Nehemiah to those usurious Jews (Neh. v. 9).—*(Trapp.)*

"They will slay me." The tendency of selfishness is to lead men to lean upon their own wisdom and to distrust God. The thought of our own safety may so absorb us, that we become unmindful of what is due to God's honour.

Verse 12. The slight semblance of truth by which the falsehood was upheld only testified that it was known to be a falsehood in the conscience.—(*Alford.*)

The root of bitterness, in this melancholy instance, was an evil heart of unbelief. The element of unbelief enters into all sins—and into none more than into this sin of concealment or disguise. To dissemble before men is to distrust God. Had Abraham been exercising his faith in God, as simply and as implicitly, in reference to the providence which watched over him, as in reference to the righteousness which justified him, he would not have thought of resorting to any carnal or crooked policy. The particular measure of precaution which he did adopt might seem the most prudent and the best, as well for his partner as for himself. If he was to do anything for himself in this matter, perhaps nothing else could be suggested than what he actually did. But the evil was that he did anything; that he did not leave the entire management of the affair to God; that he did not resolve to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.—(*Candlish.*)

Abraham failed where many believers are so likely to fail. 1. Not in wrong views of their covenant relations with God. In this Abraham was correct to the revealed will of the Almighty. He had not fallen into any doctrinal error. So believers may commit serious faults while they still hold the great verities of religion. 2. Not in wrong views of the requirements of the godly life. Abraham, all the time, well knew what was required of him in the service of his God. He would have shrunk from any act of open disobedience. But, 3. Believers often fail where Abraham failed, *in the practical application of principles to the duties and difficulties of common life.* We may be right in our views of doctrine and duty, and yet make serious mistakes in applying them to special cases arising from the complications of human affairs.

The immense power of evil which is in the world is a strong temptation to the people of God, by leading them to resort to worldly devices in order to meet that evil.

Scripture history shows that many of the saints of God failed exactly in those graces for which they were chiefly distinguished. Thus Moses, the meekest man, spake unadvisedly with his lips. Elijah the brave showed himself a coward and was ready to give up his work in despair. Abraham was renowned for his faith. At the call of God, he went forth not knowing whither he went. When God promised him a son, against hope he believed in hope. When afterwards he offered up that son, he accounted that God was able to raise him from the dead. He lived by faith, ordering all his public and private affairs by the thought that he was immediately under the eye of God. Yet in that which was the strength of his spiritual character, he failed.

Verse 13. He was sent forth to go he knew not whither, and in allusion to this he is said to have "wandered." But what is "wandering" to us, when led by Divine guidance, is a definite course of journeying to the omniscient eye that watches over and orders our steps. The fact which Abraham here mentions of an early precautionary arrangement between him and Sarah, would go far to set him right in Abimelech's esteem, as it would prove that he did not resort to the expedient because he thought worse of him and his people than of the other nations among whom he expected to sojourn. Neither the king nor people of Gerar were at all in his view when he proposed to adopt the artifice in question. —(*Bush.*)

That which may seem to be kindness, in its effects upon others, may be done at the expense of our Godward duties.

Here is a man who lives a life of faith, and in all sincerity intends it, yet employs a carnal device, which is inconsistent with the idea of such a life. What contradictions there are, even in the best of saints!

Human prudence may be disloyalty to God.

Verse 14. Abimelech bestows his royal bounty, the prophet gives his prayers. Each makes such restitution as he can for his fault.

Abraham by his conduct had exposed another man to the danger of a great sin—he had made a fatal impression and exercised an evil influence. Opportunities were lost, and mischief done, as it seemed, beyond all repair. But prayer sets all right.

In restoring Sarah to her husband, Abimelech obeyed the command of God. (Verse 7.)

To make restitution is one of the conditions by which we obtain the gifts which come by prayer.

Verse 15. Acts of kindness towards those whom we have justly reproved show that we love them still.

Pharaoh complimented Abraham out of his land (ch. xii. 20); Abimelech gives him leave to dwell where he pleases. The one was moved only by fear, the other had comfort with his fear. Abimelech felt that the presence of this good man in his land would be a blessing to him.

We should set a value on the prayers of others which have brought a blessing to us, and strive to retain the benefit of them.

Verse 16. Gentle reproofs wound not when accompanied by deeds of kindness.

Abimelech's high sense of justice: 1. In making atonement for the wrong he had done—unwittingly, indeed, on his part, but still a wrong in its effect upon others. This large gift was for "a covering of the eyes," *i.e.*, for a peace-offering to cover up the offence. 2. In vindicating Sarah's character. "Unto all that are with thee, and with all other." All her family would be interested in this act of justice towards her good name.

To render justice to others was a good preparation for enjoying the full benefits of the prophet's prayers and intercessions.

Abimelech is afterwards greatly blessed for his kindness to Abraham. He had, indeed, received a prophet and had a prophet's reward. (Ch. xxi. 22–34.)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17, 18.

AN EFFICACIOUS INTERCESSORY PRAYER.

Abraham's prayer for the doomed cities was not granted, but his prayer for Abimelech was answered in full. "God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maid-servants." Why, was this prayer successful? God has reasons for refusing the requests of His servants, which are often hid from them; and he who prays best is most satisfied calmly to accept the good pleasure of the Divine will. But in the present instance we can see some reasons why it was likely that *this* prayer should be answered.

I. **Because faith was maintained notwithstanding past failures.** Abraham had pleaded hard for the cities of the plain, yet he had seen them swept into destruction. His prayer had failed to save that wicked people from their doom. A less hardier soul than his might have been discouraged, and have lost all faith in prayer. But no difficulties daunted this believing man. It is the nature and property of genuine faith to hold out against all discouragements, to believe still in God both when He grants and when He denies. If we have proper confidence in the Divine character we have only patiently to wait and real success will come at last. Abraham still pleaded with God, notwithstanding his failure in a great instance. Persevering faith, which is superior to all discouragements, must be rewarded.

II. **Because the objects of it were disposed to receive the blessing.** The hindrances to the gracious effects of prayer lie in man's rebellious heart. God willeth not the death of any sinner. Prayers for others are more likely to be answered when, on their part, there is some disposition to receive Divine blessings. There must be a Godward direction imparted to souls which are to be blest. God meets those who are looking towards Him. Abimelech and his household had this receptivity. By desire and submission they were prepared for healing and blessing. How different with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah! They maintained open defiance against God. In their rebellious souls there was nothing to answer any movement of the Divine goodness towards them. Therefore they were left to the fate of all who contend with their Maker. Thus God's gracious purposes can be hindered by man. "I would have gathered thy children together, . . . and *ye would not.*" (Matt. xxiii. 37).

III. **Because God delights to put honour upon His servants.** God had entered into covenant with Abraham. He was God's prophet and faithful friend. It was not for nought that he was called to interpret the Divine will, and to intercede for men. God will set His visible marks of approval upon His own appointed means of blessing. He will not cause his servants to become ashamed of their confidence, but will show the world that He is with them. Learn the importance of the *prophet* to mankind. (1) He makes known the will of God. He is a messenger who has received instructions from the Supreme Ruler of all mankind. He comes to speak on behalf of God, for warning, for reproof, for the announcement of gracious purposes. (2) He is the human channel of spiritual blessings. He teaches men the way of righteousness, how they may find the chief good and reach true blessedness. Who is such a benefactor to the race as this—so important to the dearest interests of mankind! Abimelech could bring his gold, but Abraham could put him in the way of obtaining far better gifts.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 17. Abraham, by his prevarication, had brought distress on Abimelech and all his household. Being now humbled by the rebuke he had re ceived, he prayed to God for the removal of the judgments which he had been instrumental in procuring. By this means, as far as in him lay, he counteracted and reversed the mischief that he had done. It is but seldom that we can cancel in any degree the evil that we have committed; but if any way whatever present itself, we should embrace it gladly, and put forth our utmost endeavours to undo the injury we may have wrought. At all events, the course adopted by Abraham is open to us all. We may *pray* for those whom we have injured; we may beg of God to obliterate from their minds any bad impressions which, either by word or deed, we may have made on them. And if we find in them a kind, forgiving spirit, we should so much the more redouble our exertions to obtain for them the blessings of salvation, which will infinitely overbalance any evils that they may have suffered through our means.—(*Bush.*)

Our prayers have power to heal the wrongs we may have done to others by our unbelief.

The effect of Abraham's prayer is an illustration of salvation, which is the healing of the soul of those diseases sin has brought upon it.

How great is the power of the intercession of the believer with God, when it can stay the hand of judgment, and even prevail notwithstanding the infirmities and lapses of the intercessor! What efficacy, then, must we ascribe to the intercessions of that Divine Advocate who was without sin!

Verse 18. The name Jehovah is employed at the end of the chapter, because the relation of the Creator and Preserver to Sarah is there prominent. —(*Murphy.*)

CHAPTER XXI.

Critical Notes.—1. The Lord visited Sarah.] Jehovah, the Covenant God. To "visit," in this connection, signifies drawing near for the purpose of conferring a favour (Gen. l. 24; Ruth i. 6.) The LXX. has ἐπεσκέψατο, a word adopted by St. Luke in two places in the song of Zacharias (Luke i. 68-78). **2. The set time.** As promised in Gen. xvii. 21; xviii. 14. **3. Called the name of his son, Isaac.]** In obedience to the Divine command (Gen. xvii. 19). **4. Circumcised his son Isaac, being eight days old, as God had commanded him.]** (Gen. xvii. 10-12.) **8. And the child grew, and was weaned.]** The weaning was often delayed till three years, or more, after birth (2 Macc. vii. 27). Samuel was not weaned till he was old enough to be left with Eli, when he would, probably, be more than three years old. *Made a great feast.* The occasion is still celebrated in the East as a family *feast*, to which friends are invited. The child partakes of it with the rest, as it is regarded as his introduction to the customary fare of the country. **9. Mocking.]** From the same root as the name *Isaac, i.e.*, laughter. The word cannot here be understood in an innocent sense. It was a bitter, sarcastic laugh. St. Paul fastens upon it the character of *persecution* (Gal. iv. 29). **12. In Isaac shall thy seed be called.]** *Heb. In Isaac shall seed* (posterity) *be called to thee.* Explained by the Apostle (Rom. ix. 7, 8). The whole history is allegorised (Gal. iv. 20-22). **13. Make a nation.]** A renewal of the promise made in Gen. xvi. 10; xvii. 20. *Because he is thy seed.* "It seemed to be a specialty of Abraham's descendants to multiply into nations; the very fact of descent from him is alleged as a reason why Ishmael should become one." (*Alford.*) **14. Abraham rose up early in the morning.]** Hence the Divine command was given to him in the night. *Bread.* Used as a general term for provisions. *Bottle of water.* The leathern bottle of the East, made of the whole skin of an animal. In this case, probably, a kid-skin, as Hagar could not well have carried a goat-skin. *And the child.* To be connected with "gave" in the previous clause. He gave it (bread), and the child, to Hagar. The LXX. and Targ. of Onk. convey the meaning, that he placed the child on her shoulder. But this is absurd, for Ishmael would now be quite sixteen years old. He was led by the hand (verse 18). *The child.* More properly a boy, or a lad. Boys often married at that age in the East. *The wilderness.* Not desert, but open commons—land not profitable for cultivation, but affording pasture. *Beersheba.* So named by anticipation (verse 31). **15. Cast the child.]** The *Heb.* word generally conveys the idea of forcible projection, but in this case it is to be understood of a gentle laying down, or suffering to repose (Psa. lv. 22). Language is used as if he was a mere child, and truly in his exhausted condition he was as such, at this time. **16. As it were a bow-shot.]** "This is a common figure of speech in their ancient writings, 'the distance of an arrow;'" 'so far as the arrow flies.' The common way of measuring a *short* distance is to say 'It is a *call* off'—*i.e.*, so far as a man's voice can reach" (*Roberts' Scripture Illustrations*). **17. And God heard the voice of the lad, and the angel of God** *called to Hagar*. *Elohim* in both places. "The angel of *Elohim*, not *Jehovah;* because Ishmael, since the Divinely ordained removal from the house of Abraham, passes from under the protection of the Covenant God to that of the leading and providence of God, the Ruler of all nations." (*Keil.*) **18. Hold him in thine hand.]** *Heb.* "Strengthen thine hand upon him," *i.e.*, assist and support him. **20. And he became an archer.]** "He grew an archer, or multiplied into a tribe of archers." (*Murphy.*) The descendants of Ishmael were distinguished for their skill in the use of the bow. (Is. xxi. 17.) **21. The wilderness of Paran.]** The great desert, now called *El Tih*, running from the southern border of Palestine down to the northern part of the Sinaitic peninsula. He adopted the habits of a wilderness man, according to the prophecy. (Gen. xvi. 16.) **22. Phichol.]** Name signifies "mouth of all," *i.e.*, all-commanding. Probably an official title **23. Nor with my son, nor with my son's son.]** The LXX. has "neither my seed, nor my name." *Murphy* renders it *kin and kith*, "to represent the conversational alliterative phrase of the original." **31. Beersheba.]** "The well of the oath," or, "the well of the seven." The latter meaning may have some allusion to the seven lambs by which Abraham secured the possession of the well. (Verses 29, 30.) The *Heb.* word for taking an oath comes from the same root which signifies *seven*. The reason is, an oath was confirmed by seven witnesses. Herodotus says that the Arabians chose some seven things for the confirmation of the oath. *They sware both of them; Heb., were sworn.* In *Heb.*, "swearing" is always represented by the passive form of speech, conveying the idea that one is adjured by another, or has an oath imposed upon him by another. **32. Thus they made a covenant.]** "Cut a covenant," according to the usual *Heb.* expression. Hence, probably, animals were slain, and the covenant thus ratified by the parties passing between the divided portions. **33. And Abraham planted a grove.]** Properly, the Oriental tamarisk tree or grove. They grow to a remarkable height, and furnish a wide shade. It seems as if this were a religious act, as designed to secure some retired place for worship. Such groves were afterwards forbidden on account of their connection with idolatrous practices. (Deut. xvi. 21.) *The everlasting God.* As the peculiar explanation of the name Jehovah. This title is found only in one other place. (Is. xl. 28.) St. Paul uses the equivalent Greek epithet. (Rom. xvi. 26.) **34. Many days.]** To be understood as representing a considerable period, during which Isaac had time to grow up from a child to such an age as would render him fit to carry the wood for the offering. (Gen. xxii. 6.)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1–8.

THE BIRTH OF ISAAC.

We now come to the first substantial result of God's covenant with Abraham. The child which had only been present to the eye of faith and hope was now before him—God's promises turned into realities, as they always shall be. As the birth of Isaac was not only marked by special circumstances, but is also an important event in the history of religion, it may be considered from several points of view.

I. As it illustrates the power of God. The birth of a son to Abraham is here regarded not as a common occurrence in the course of nature, but as the direct result of the visitation of God. (Verses 1, 2.) It was an exhibition of Divine power, but in that form which we call *miraculous*. 1. *God's power as distinctly seen.* No one who considers this vast universe, with its mighty forces and wonderful order, can fail to be impressed with an overwhelming sense of the power of God. But all men do not consider, and the very constancy and greatness of that power prevents it from being distinctly recognised. A miracle does not require more of Divine power than is put forth in the maintenance of the system of nature, but it may be to us a greater *proof* of that power. The birth of Isaac was the result of the special interference of God, and His power was distinctly seen. The observation of the regular course of nature taught Abraham what to *expect*, and he had his natural hopes like other men. But his faith in the promise of God enabled him to believe against such hope. He knew that God was "able" to perform, and now he had a special proof of it. 2. *God's power as it affects personal interest.* This was not a wonderful thing which they were to gaze upon from the outside with distant awe and astonishment. They were *personally interested* in the event. They were an essential part of it. They were obliged to stand within that circle in which the power of God was now displayed, and the sense of it brought home to them. Doubt would be impossible of that which so intimately touched themselves. Thus, whatever is wrought *within* us, gives us the highest proof of God. What is the moral miracle of regeneration but the power of God so brought home to us that we have consciousness of its reality? Who can deny the Divine source of His heavenly birth? 3. *God's power manifested as benevolent.* There are judicial visitations of God, when He comes to punish transgressors. (Ex. xxviii. 5.) But this was a friendly visit, full of grace and good gifts. The Divine power was put forth, not to alarm or crush, but with kind intent. This is the aspect of His power which is given to His saints to behold—the power of God unto salvation.

II. As it illustrates the faithfulness of God. The birth of this child was not only a loving and gracious expression of God's power, but was also the accomplishment of His *word.* The child was given "according to promise." His parents could not regard his birth otherwise than as a proof of the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God. Such experience have all His children. 1. *The promises of God sooner or later pass into exact fulfilment.* His word is as good as the fact, and he who trusts in that word has an inheritance upon a sure title. He has a substantial foundation for a hope which "maketh not ashamed." The universe was but the thought of God expressing itself in an outward reality. He spake the word and creation arose. God's word tends inevitably to pass into fulfilment. 2. *Their fulfilment justifies our confidence in God.* We *ought* to have confidence in God's word without any immediate proof; but the journey of faith is long, and God has consideration for the infirmity of our poor human nature in giving us encouragement by the way. He deals with us as a kind Father who is always giving us reasons to love and serve Him. All is not left to the future world to disclose and verify. We have real and essential good now and here. Abraham had not received *all* the promises of God, but he had received enough to justify his confidence, and to encourage him to persevere in a life of faith to the end. 3. *Their fulfilment is the stay of the believer's soul.* "The word of the Lord is a *tried* word." We may consider it as sure, and we can build upon it without any misgiving. The memory of God's past dealings becomes a ground of hope for the future. "Thou hast been my help" is a proper plea to urge in prayer for blessings yet to be given. God's promises already verified give us that confidence which becomes the stay of our soul for the time to come. We feel that there is something sure and fixed in the midst of change and decay. We come to "*know* whom we have believed. It is only when the doctrines about God pass into the facts of experience within us that they become *knowledge.* And of all foundations to build upon the only secure one is knowledge. Our faith itself derives its value from the fact that it is concerned with realities.

III. As it illustrates the faith of man. The wonderful birth of this child was the reward of faith. Abraham believed in God against all human hope, and Sarah "by faith received strength to conceive seed" (Heb. xi. 11). 1. *It was a faith which was severely tried.* (1) *By long waiting.* Abraham had waited for twenty-five years. (2) *By natural difficulties.* He and his wife had advanced to a stage of life when there could be no human prospect of offspring. So the faith of believers is tried by many delays, and by difficulties that to the eye of sense seem to be insurmountable. Our way often appears to be shut up, as if we could go no further; but God interferes in His own good time. Our faith's journey continues, and we pass on to new triumphs 2. *It was a practical* *faith.* All the time that he was waiting, Abraham was obedient to the word of the Lord. Faith, with him, was not a mere sentiment, but was practically one with duty. It is quite indifferent whether we call his conduct faith or obedience. He chose a certain course of life, and entered upon certain duties, because he believed in God. Now that the promise is fulfilled he is still giving attention to his duty. He circumcised his son and called him by that name which God had appointed. (Verses 3, 4.)

IV. As it looks onwards to the birth of the world's Redeemer. This was not an isolated event, but had reference to a "Greater Man." The whole life of Abraham was ordered so as to prepare the line along which the Messiah should come. The details of the birth of Isaac, considered merely in themselves, are but a piece of human history calculated to awaken but a passing curiosity and interest. But when they are regarded in their relation to the birth of the Son of God, these details are invested with a surpassing importance. Throughout the history of this chosen family, God was working out His way towards an end—the bringing in of His "first-begotten into the world." (Heb. i. 6.) The analogy between the birth of Isaac and that of Jesus Christ is obvious. 1. *Both births were announced long before.* Indeed, to Abraham the two births were virtually announced together. He had to wait many years before the promise was fulfilled, and the world had to wait through long ages for the birth of the Son of Man. 2. *Both occur at the time fixed by God.* Isaac was born at "the set time" of which God had spoken to Abraham. So the date of Messiah's birth was fixed by the prophet Daniel. (Dan. ix. 24.) Seventy prophetic weeks are four hundred and ninety years. The re-establishment of the theocracy began thirteen years before the rebuilding of Jerusalem, 457 B.C. This number subtracted from four hundred and ninety years will give thirty-three years, to be reckoned from the commencement of the Christian era. Thus the Messiah was to be cut off in the middle of the last week. All this is now a matter of history. Thus the time when Christ should appear in the world was before appointed. 3. *Both persons were named before their birth.* Isaac's name was given according to the Divine command. (Gen. xvii. 19.) So was the name Jesus. (Matt. i. 21.) 4. *Both births were supernatural.* Each was born after a miraculous manner. 5. *Both births were the occasion of great joy.* Abraham and Sarah had more than the common joy of parents. The event was so wonderful that amazement must have mingled with their delight. When Jesus was born angels and men rejoiced. 6. *Both births are associated with the life beyond.* The faithful shall "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." They shall be "with Christ," "for ever with the Lord."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. God pays not His people with words only, He fools them not off with fair promises. Good men are the children that will not lie. (Isaiah lxiii. 8.) Their Father is a God that cannot lie. (Titus 1, 2.) He is the God of Amen, as Isaiah calleth Him (Isaiah lxv. 16); "all His promises are Yea, and Amen in Christ Jesus" (2 Cor. i. 20); "the faithful and true witness." (Rev. iii. 14.)—(*Trapp.*)

Sarah's visitation is a type of the visitation of Mary, notwithstanding the great distinction between them. The visitation lies in the extraordinary and wonderful personal grace, to which an immeasurable general human salvation is closely joined. But with Sarah this visitation occurs very late in life, and after long waiting; with Mary it was entirely unexpected. Sarah's body is dead; Mary had not known a husband. The son of Sarah is himself a type of the son of Mary. But with both women the richest promise of heaven is limited through one particular woman on the earth, a conception in faith, an apparently impossible, but yet actual human birth; both are illustrious instances of the destination of the female race, of the importance of the wife, the mother for the kingdom of God. Both became illustrious since they freely subjected themselves to this destination, since they yielded their sons in the future, the sons of promise, or in the son of promise; for Isaac has all his importance as a type of Christ, and Christ, the son of Mary, is the manifesta- of the Eternal Son.—(*Lange.*)

Believers are visited with the word of promise, and then with the word of fulfilment.

Verse 2. This is stated as explanatory of the manner in which the Divine veracity affirmed in the first verse was established. God had *promised* that Sarah should conceive and bear a son, and she *did* thus conceive and bring forth; but it does not necessarily follow that the *time* of her conceiving was subsequent to the events related in the preceding chapter; on the contrary, there is every reason to believe that this took place some weeks or months before (comp. Gen. xvii. 21), but it is mentioned here, without regard to date, merely as a fulfilment of the promise.—(*Bush.*)

Faith which once faltered may gather strength again and achieve noble deeds. Sarah has won a place amongst the ancient worthies. (Heb. xi. 11.)

The birth of this son was not *according to nature* (Gal. iv. 23), but *above nature.* The miraculous element marks throughout the history of the chosen people. Thus mankind was prepared for the grand miracle of the manifestation of the Son of God.

Human redemption belongs to a course of things altogether above nature, for nature preaches no doctrine of forgiveness, no restoration of powers when once they are dead. Grace alone can bring salvation.

With God nothing can occur out of season, or fall otherwise than at the appointed time.

One great difference between this child and the son of Hagar consisted in this: the one was "born after the flesh," that is, in the ordinary course of generation; but the other, "after the spirit," that is, by extraordinary Divine interposition, and in virtue of a special promise. Analogous to these were those Jews, on the one hand, who were merely descended from Abraham *according to the flesh*, and those, on the other, who were "not of the circumcision only, but also walked in the steps of the faith of their father Abraham." (Rom. iv. 12.) The former were the children of the bondwoman who were cast out, the latter of the freewoman, who, being "His people whom He foreknew," were not cast away, but were counted for the seed. (Gal. iv. 28-31; Rom. ix. 7, 9; xi. 1, 2.)—(*Fuller.*)

Verse 3. As the name is associated with the fulfilment, it keeps in mind the contrast between the idea and the reality. Her laughter of incredulity is turned now into the laughter of joy at the event. (Verse 6.) The name *Isaac*, therefore, is most significant. Through this name, *Isaac* is designated as the fruit of omnipotent grace working against and above the forces of nature. It is as much as to say, this son of promise is indeed he, the mention of whose birth was laughed as impossible. So, afterwards, *Ishmael* laughed at him, as too weak to be the ground of such attention and such hopes. (Verse 9.) And the name keeps in view this contrast of the natural and the supernatural.—(*Jacobus.*)

Verse 4. The patriarch here pursues his accustomed tenor of obedience, by subjecting his child to the painful rite of circumcision. Nothing is of higher value in the sight of God than an implicit observance of His positive precepts, and a disposition to adhere with punctilious strictness to the letter of the command, neither failing nor exceeding in the rule of duty. This is peculiarly important in the matter of sacramental institutions, where, as we learn from the example of the Papists, human perverseness is prone to fabricate new observances, and enforce them by promises and threatenings equally unknown to the Scriptures. Well would it be were they as much intent upon performing what God has really enjoined.—(*Bush.*)

The joy of a great blessing should not hinder us from paying the minutest attention to duty, and carefully observing every ordinance of God.

This was a sign of the covenant love of God towards the child, stamped upon him. Circumcision was an Egyptian, not a Jewish rite. It was therefore an adopted ceremony, and a religious signification was now thrown into it. So it is with our rites of baptism, of the Lord's day, of the Supper of the Redeemer. These institutions were in existence before the time of Christ; He made them new by connecting them with new ideas. It is wise thus to vitalize existing forms, to infuse into them fresh meaning. We do not want new ones, the old are good enough for us; for what we want is, to throw into the old a new life, that that which is dying out may become alive. Circumcision was a coarse rite given to a coarse nation, a sign that they could understand; notwithstanding, they forgot that it was only a symbol. Prophet after prophet testified against this. As soon as the form began to lose its meaning and became substituted for the spiritual reality, it was proclaimed by our Master and His inspired servants that both were dead. And the fate of that institution is the fate of all form when it becomes nothing but *form;* and men are wanted now who will say out with Apostolic authority, baptism is nothing, the Lord's Supper is nothing, unless a living spirit be within them.—(*Robertson.*)

Verse 5. The sacred historian takes care to show that the birth of Isaac was *above nature.* 1. Hence, it foreshadows the miraculous birth of Jesus. 2. It was the beginning of a Divine supernatural agency which would continue to work throughout the history of the chosen people. Even to this day, the inextinguishable life of this ancient race is a perpetual witness to the power of God—indeed, a miracle wrought before our very eyes.

Isaac was born thirty years after the call of Abraham, and when his parents had lived for sixty years in fruitless marriage union. After many delays and difficulties insurmountable by nature, God's promised mercies come at last.

Isaac.—1. The child of hope. 2. The child of prayer. 3. The child of faith.

If we believe in the miracle of creation, we are prepared to believe in any other miraculous interference of God. He who brought life and being from barren nothing can afterwards depart from His established ways, and give life when nature forbids the hope of it.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6, 7.

The Rejoicing at Isaac's Birth.

I. It was the reward of faith and patience. There were peculiar circumstances connected with the birth of this child which made it an extraordinary occasion. The promise had long been given, and the parents had waited patiently through many years of disappointment, and sorrows of hope deferred. The time when they could expect offspring in the ordinary course of nature had long since passed away. They were thrown entirely upon the strength of their faith, and upon that hope whose substance and foundation is faith. At length the time arrived when their faith and patient waiting are rewarded. What joy must they have felt when they found that their confidence in God—a confidence tried by long and anxious waiting—was justified by the bestowal of such a blessing! That is the deepest and most plentiful joy which comes after a long trial of faith and patience. Such is the joy into which the pious enter after death. The glory of heaven is the reward of the faith and patience of the saints.

II. It was hailed with a song of gratitude. The words of Sarah have been called "the first cradle hymn." This song is the first of its kind recorded in literature. The peculiarity of the occasion justify its strong expressions. 1. *There was an element of amazement and wonder.* "Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have borne him a son in his old age" (verse 7). No one could naturally have expected such an event, and all who beheld it must have been filled with amazement. The miraculous nature of the blessing made it the occasion of an extraordinary joy. So all the gifts of grace excite our wonder and amazement. We are constrained continually to say, "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." 2. *There was an element touchingly human.* The song is put into the mouth of the mother, for the birth of this child would affect her feelings more intensely. The father's would be a sober and thoughtful joy, but the mother's would be an uncontrollable tide of emotion. Her feeling would be too great for many words, and could only have its humanly natural expression in laughter. 3. *There was a confident expectation of universal sympathy.* "All that hear me will *laugh with me*." She could not imagine any one regarding her happiness with indifference. All who knew the fact, and were capable of judging of its importance, would have full sympathy with her. Though her words were expressions of human feeling proper to the time, yet we may justly regard them as prophetic. How many have rejoiced because of the chosen race whose seed was to be reckoned in Isaac! How many incalculable blessings have they given to mankind!—above all, the Saviour of the world. The child-bearing of this mother of the chosen race is the human channel along which salvation has been borne to us. "Salvation is of the Jews." The mother of our Lord had this grateful confidence in the sympathy of the good throughout all time. "All generations shall call me blessed." 4. *There was an acknowledgment of the Divine source of the joy.* "*God* hath made me to laugh" (verse 6). In all her wild amazement of joy, she was not forgetful of God, from whom the blessing came. She triumphed because she had faith in a Living Person who was able to perform His gracious word. We do not read of any doctrines that she held, but she had faith in a personal God. Through all the degrees and stages of Divine revelation, this is the one distinguishing characteristic mark of the saints of God. They had faith, not in anything about Him, but in Him; not faith in His attributes, or in any intellectual conceptions of them, but directly lodged and reposed in Himself. Their individual existence was united to His personal being. This is the simplification of theology—God hath made me to know, to feel, and to rejoice. In His favour *is* life, with all its gladness and blessed issues.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 6. The expression carries an allusion to Isaac's name, and to the circumstance mentioned (ch. xvii. 17-19), on which it was founded. It was a mode of speech which not only showed how sincerely she recognised the propriety of Abraham's laughing on the occasion referred to, and how cordially she assents to the name thus bestowed on the child, but intimates also that God had made *her*, as well as Abraham, to laugh; which was, in fact, a virtual condemnation of her former incredulity. We meet in the prophets with some striking allusions to this incident, where Sarah is considered a symbol of the

Church. Thus Isa. liv. 1., "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear," etc. (Comp. Isa. li. 2, 3, ; Gal. iv. 22-28). *All that bear will laugh with me.* Will sympathise with my joy, and tender to me their congratulations. To this also the prophet alludes, Isa. lxvi. 10: "Rejoice ye *with Jerusalem*, and be glad *with her*, all ye that love her; rejoice with joy *with her*;" where the Jerusalem mentioned is expressly said by the apostle (Gal. iv. 22, 27) to be mystically shadowed out by Sarah.—*(Bush.)*

The children of faith, though they may have their time of weeping, and be exposed to the ridicule of the world, will also have their time to laugh. Gladness is sown for the upright in heart.

God gave this laughter to vindicate His promise, and to rebuke her unbelief.

Verse 7. The natural incredibility of the event enhances her joy and wonder. And so her testimony is here recorded to the amazing power and grace of God in making good His covenant promises. God is wont to get such clear and express testimonies to His miraculous works, to show that they were not by any means natural. And it was most important that this event be witnessed to by the glad mother as being not according to nature, but beyond nature; natural indeed in its progress and issue, but not therefore in its origin. *Who would have said.* How naturally unsupposable. Who ever would have reported such a thing would have been counted mad. *Sarah should*, etc. Heb.—*Sarah is suckling children.* Yet it is even so! *For I have born him*, etc. This is the mother's new-found joy which she herself can scarcely credit. This laughter is referred to in Isa. xlix. 13; lii. 9, and by St. Paul in Gal. iv. 7.—*(Jacobus.)*

In her joy Sarah speaks of many children when she had borne only one son, who, however, was better to her than ten sons. She will say, not only has my dead body received strength from God to bring a child into the world, but I am conscious of such strength that I can supply its food, which sometimes fails much younger and more vigorous mothers. Sarah nursed her child although she was a princess (ch. xxiii. 6) and of noble blood, for the law of nature itself requires this from all, since, with this very end in view, God has given breasts to all and filled them with milk. The Scriptures united these two functions, the bearing of children and nursing them, as belonging to the mother. (Luke xi. 27, xxiii. 29; Psalm xxii. 10.) Thus these two things were reckoned among the blessings and kindness of the great God (chap. xlix. 25), while an unfruitful body and dry breasts are a punishment from Him. (Hos. ix. 11-14.)—*(Lange.)*

Though she were a great lady, yet she was a nurse. Let it not be niceness but necessity that hinders any mother from so doing, lest she be found more monstrous than the "sea-monsters," that draw out their breast, and give suck to their young. (Lam. iv. 3.)—*(Trapp.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8-13.

THE EXPULSION OF ISHMAEL.

This portion of the history, though it staggers our natural judgment, is that very incident of which the most emphatic use is made in other parts of Scripture for the purposes of the spiritual life.

Beyond all question the thing here done is felt, at first sight, on all hands to be harsh, and the manner of doing it even harsher still. Surely never was slight offence more spitefully avenged! An unmannerly boy vents some ill-timed and ill-judged jest, and his mother, as well as himself, must be cast helpless on the wide world on account of it! This looks like the very wantonness of female jealousy and passion. No wonder that the patriarch needed a Divine communication to make him recognise in his irritated partner's unrelenting demand the very mind and will of God Himself. (Ver. 12, 13.) It is not necessary to acquit Sarah of all personal vindictiveness, or to consider her as acting from the best and highest motives, merely because God commanded Abraham to hearken unto her voice. This may be only another instance of evil overruled for good. It is true the Apostle Paul still more directly and immediately ascribes Divine authority to the suggestion of Sarah, when he formally quotes her words as a portion of the inspired record and revelation of the Divine decree. (Gal. iv. 30.) Even this, however, may imply nothing more than what is said in the Gospel of a most remarkable utterance concerning the death of Jesus. (St. John xi. 49-52.) The high priest consulted but the dictates of a worldly policy, yet he gave forth what turned out to be an oracular Divine prediction. And it may have been with equal unconsciousness of its being a heaven-directed and heaven-inspired voice, that Sarah, yielding to her own impetuous temper, called for the removal of a rival out of the way of her own son's succession and title to the inheritance. There are certain circumstances which we should take into account, not for the vindication of Sarah's character and conduct, but for the better understanding of the Divine procedure.

I. **Let the actual offence of Ishmael be fairly understood and estimated.** He was now no longer a child, but a lad of some fourteen years of age. St. Paul represents his conduct in a strong light: "He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit," and he points to it as the type and model of the cruel envy with which the "children of promise" are in every age pursued. (Gal. iv. 28, 29.) And our Lord Himself, when, with an evident reference to the expulsion of Ishmael, He speaks of "the servant not abiding in the house for ever, but the son abiding ever," goes on to add—identifying the unbelieving Jews with the servant, or the bondmaid's son, and taking to Himself the position of the real son, the true Isaac—"Ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you." (John viii. 37.) "Ye seek to kill me." Is there no allusion here to violence threatened against Isaac on the part of Ishmael and Hagar? Is not this the actual parallel intended between their treatment of the child of promise and the treatment Jesus met with at the hands of the Jews—the treatment which His followers also meet with at the hands of the unbelieving world? From the history itself, it is plain that Ishmael's mocking had a deeper meaning than a mere wild and wanton jest. That it had respect to the birthright is evident, both from Sarah's reasoning and from the Lord's. She assigns, as the cause of her anxiety to have Ishmael cast out, her apprehension lest he should claim a joint-interest with Isaac in the inheritance. And the Lord sanctions her proposal on this very ground, when He says to Abraham, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called."

II. **The competition in question admitted of no compromise.** Whatever might have been her motives, Sarah did, in point of fact, stand with God in the controversy. She believed God, when, in accordance not more with her own natural feelings than with the known will of God, she determined to resist every attempt to interfere with the prerogative of the child of promise. For it was with Isaac, and with his seed after him—that seed being no other than the Messiah Himself—that God had expressly said He would establish His covenant for an everlasting covenant. And the determination of Sarah might be the more decided if she saw any indication of hesitancy in the mind of even the patriarch himself. For Abraham may have been swayed by his affection for his first-born child, as well as Sarah by her fondness for the son of her old age. In point of fact, Abraham felt great reluctance to give up his hope of Ishmael being his heir and successor in the covenant. Before the birth of Isaac, he clung to that hope with great tenacity, and pleaded hard on behalf of Ishmael that he might have the birthright blessing (ch. xvii. 18). And even after Isaac was born, he seems still to have a leaning towards his old partiality for Ishmael. Even after he has got the child of promise bodily in his arms, his faith sometimes wavers. He can scarcely persuade himself to hazard all on so precarious a risk as the puny life of an infant who has so strangely come, and may as strangely pass away. He would fain keep Ishmael still in reserve, and not altogether lose his hold of that other line of descent. This is rendered extremely probable by the pains which the Lord takes to remove the last scruples of lingering unbelief, to reconcile him to the destiny of Ishmael.

III. The severity of the measure resorted to is apt to be greatly exaggerated if it is looked at in the light of the social usages of modern domestic life. It was usual, in those primitive times, for the head of a household to make an early separation between the heir, who was to be retained at home, and the other members of the family, who must be sent to push their way elsewhere. Abraham himself adopted this course on other occasions as well as the present with reference to his other sons whom he had besides Ishmael (ch. xxv. 5, 6). The presumption, therefore, is warranted that Abraham meant to deal on the same terms with Ishmael when he and his mother were cast out, and that this is intended to be indicated in the brief description subsequently given of his manner of disposing of his children generally.—*(Candlish.)*

THE DESTINIES OF ISHMAEL.

At the weaning of Isaac there was a feast. Hagar and her son heard the merriment, and it was gall to their wounded spirits; it looked like intentional insult, for Ishmael had been the heir presumptive, but now, by the birth of Isaac, had become a mere slave and dependant; and the son of Hagar mocked at the joy in which he could not partake. Wherefore Sarah said unto Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son." These were harsh words: it was hard for one so young to have all blighted; it was grievous in Abraham's sight to witness the bitter fate of his eldest born. And yet was it not the most blessed destiny that could happen to the boy? The hot blood of the Egyptian mother, which coursed through his veins, could not have been kept in check in the domestic circle among vassals and dependants; he was sent to measure himself with *men*, to cut out his own way in the world, to learn independence, resolution, energy; and it is for this reason that to this very day his descendants are so sharply stamped with all the individuality of their founder. In them are exhibited the characteristics of Abraham and Hagar, the marvellous devoutness of the one with the fierce passions of the other, and together with these the iron will, the dignified calmness of self dependence wrought out by circumstances in the character of Ishmael.—(*Robertson.*)

THE ALLEGORY OF ISAAC AND ISHMAEL.

We have the authority of St. Paul for giving this history an allegorical interpretation. (Gal. iv. 22–24.) It is, without doubt, a real history, recording the thoughts and actions of living men; but it is *capable* of being treated as an allegory. Moreover, it *requires* such a treatment. The facts themselves have a spiritual meaning. Ishmael and Isaac, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion, Jerusalem which now is, and Jerusalem which is above, are all of them contrasted in antagonistic pairs, as representing principles essentially distinct. Hagar "answereth to that Jerusalem which now is," and Sarah to that "Jerusalem which is above, and which is the mother of us all." These things correspond, each to each. In the fact that Abraham had a twofold seed—one after the flesh, and the other by promise, we have the germ of the Gospel—the essential characteristics of the legal and evangelical dispensations. The history of God's chosen people was under His distinct and special control, and was so ordered and governed as to be a fitting vehicle for the conveyance of spiritual lessons. We shall understand how this history teaches the difference between the genius of the Law and the Gospel, if we make a contrast between these two sons of Abraham.

I. **Contrasted as to their origin.** Ishmael was born after the ordinary manner. There was nothing more remarkable about his birth than about that of any other child. But Isaac came by a miraculous birth. His superior position and spiritual significance is, however, not derived from the fact that he was born of Sarah (though in a miraculous manner), but rather from the fact that he was "the child of promise." His parents could have no doubt that he was a special gift from God—an accomplishment of the word of Him who spoke from heaven. These two sons represent two different societies—the world, and the Church. One is from beneath—arises here in the ordinary course of things; the other is from above, not derived from any earthly society, but "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (1 Peter i. 23.) This gifted society—the Church—holds fellowship with the unseen world, and owns a heavenly citizenship. The birth from above distinguishes the children of this world from the children of light.

II. **Contrasted as to their position in the household.** The relative positions of Ishmael and Isaac in the household were essentially different, and that in two respects. 1. *As to the liberty enjoyed.* Ishmael, being born of a bond-servant, had no natural right to freedom. Such is the position of man under the legal covenant. He is in a state of bondage, and though he may strive to please God and to keep the Law, he is like a slave working towards freedom, and not as one who works with the inspiring thoughts of a man already free. He feels the yoke. However willing to rise to the highest ideal of duty, he is oppressed with a sense of failure. (Rom. vii. 7-25.) This covenant "gendereth to bondage," exacts high service under severe penalties, which conditions the natural man is not able to fulfil. The case is still more hopeless when a man gains some spiritual insight, and sees "how exceedingly broad are God's commandments." Isaac, on the other hand, was in the house as a free-born son. Liberty was his birthright. More than this, he was "born not after the flesh," but "by promise." He was placed by the Divine will under the new covenant. So, under the Gospel, believers are in the house of God not as bond, but as free. They have not to work for liberty. They are free already, and work cheerfully *from* a sense of their freedom. 2. *As to the security of their positions.* Ishmael had no permanent standing in the house. The dark spot of slavery was upon him, and he only held the blessings of his home on sufferance. Isaac, as a free-born son, abides in the house for ever. The promise of God gave him more than a double security. It gave him absolute security. No earthly power could rob him of his high privilege. Under the Law the position of men is, at best, precarious. They can only abide in the house on sufferance. Their title is forfeited by disobedience and shortcomings in duty. If they fail to fulfil the conditions imposed, their position is gone. We know in what all this must issue for sinful man striving to maintain a place in the household of God by means of the Law, and without that assistance and sense of security which the Divine grace can alone impart. It must issue in his expulsion. But Isaac's position is ours, under the Gospel. We are in the house as fully approved. Our place is secured in perpetuity by the Divine promise. We have the "glorious liberty of the sons of God." Such is our heritage under the law of grace. Ishmael's condition, though it fitly serves the purpose of the allegory, may be also regarded as affording a ground of hope to us sinful men. We are all born in slavery, and can only obtain freedom by a special grace. Ishmael might have retained the privilege of remaining in Abraham's family. He might have partaken of Isaac's birthright, if, instead of persecuting, he had stooped to "kiss the son." If, instead of standing upon his own right, he had been willing to take the benefits of Isaac's title, he, too, would have continued to enjoy the glorious inheritance. Even if the stain on our birth be ever so black, and our natural prospects ever so gloomy, if we are willing to abandon our ground of confidence, and to receive the free gifts of grace, we are accepted. The grand lesson is, to renounce all confidence in the flesh—to trust no privileges or works (Phil. iii. 7, 9), but by faith freely to receive our share in the heritage of God's first-born Son.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 8. St. Augustine observeth here, that this solemnity at the weaning of Isaac was a type of our spiritual regeneration; at, and after which, the faithful keep a continual feast. "Let us keep the festivity" (1 Cor. v. 7), or holy day, saith Paul, that "feast of fat things, full of marrow; of wines on the lees well refined" (Isa. xxv. 6), proceeding from milk to stronger meat (Heb. v. 12), and being to the world as a weaned child. His mouth doth not water after homely provisions, that hath lately tasted of delicate sustenance.—(*Trapp.*)

It is probable that Abraham gathered his friends and servants around him at this feast. The "prophet" would not be likely to miss such an opportunity of discoursing upon God's special favour to himself, and exhorting his company to trust in God, and to the praise of His name. They were all interested in those gifts of the Divine goodness imparted to this distinguished man, in whose seed all the families of the earth were to be blessed.

There can be no true religion amongst mankind without fellowship, and the joyful recognition of God's blessings. There must be an element of joy and gladness which swallows up the sense of sorrow and sin. The Christian religion has its feasts, for it is glad tidings of great joy.

Verse 9. Now is recorded the casting out of Ishmael—the son of a human expedient. This was—1. To make the whole hope depend upon the son specially given by God. 2. To separate this hostile element from the Covenant family. Though this was in the plan of God, yet there was to be an occasion for it, and that was the wilful *mocking* of Isaac by Ishmael.—(*Jacobus.*)

Ishmael despised this child, and ridiculed the idea that he should be the origin of a great history charged with so much importance to mankind. This persecution was prompted by unbelief, envy, and pride. Thus God's way of deliverance—His salvation—cannot be appreciated by those who are inwardly separated from the household of faith.

Persecution arises from that inward hostility which must ever be between natural and spiritual men.

St. Paul says that Ishmael persecuted Isaac (Gal. iv. 29), and he is here designated the "son of Hagar *the Egyptian*," to intimate that the predicted four hundred years' affliction of Abraham's seed *by the Egyptians* commenced at this time in the insults and taunts of Ishmael, the son of an *Egyptian* woman.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 10. The facts have an underlying sense, namely, that there are two dispensations represented by Hagar and Sarah—the Law and the Gospel, and two classes of sons in the visible Church, as there are these two in the family of Abraham—the one of the legal spirit, the other of the Gospel; the one after the flesh, the other after the spirit; the former persecuting and opposing the latter. But the separation must be made, as is here done, in Abraham's house. The son of the bondwoman—the Ishmael—the children of bondage, of the Judaizing, legal spirit—must be cast out as not allowed to inherit along with the son of the freewoman. They who are in bondage to the righteousness of the law, do thus scorn and persecute those who are of the free spirit of the Gospel. They cannot live in the same house. (1) The same great idea runs through all the history of the Church, and pervades all the Scripture and all God's dealings. (2) We see the unity of the Bible and of the Church.—(*Jacobus.*)

Verse 11. He who is singled out as an example of faith to all ages, is also, throughout the whole course of his history, an example of tender human feeling.

The conflict of human duties is often a sore trial to the saints of God.

Verse **12.** God enjoins this as reasonable, on the ground that in Isaac was his seed to be called. This means not only that Isaac was to be called his seed, but in Isaac, as the progenitor, was included the seed of Abraham in the highest and utmost sense of the phrase. From him the holy seed was to spring that was to be the agent in eventually bringing the whole race again under the covenant of Noah in that higher form which it assumes in the New Testament.—(*Murphy.*)

God overrules the stormy passions of human nature to bring about His own large purposes of good.

We must not refuse to join in doing what God commands, however contrary it may be to our natural feelings, nor on account of the suspicious motives of some with whom we are called to act.—(*Fuller.*)

The history of God's chosen people leads the way up to that One Name which alone brings salvation.

The wife, then, is to be hearkened to when she speaks reason. Samson's mother had more faith than her husband (Judges xiii. 23); and Priscilla is sometimes set before Aquila. Paul's hearers at Philippi were only women at first (Acts xvi. 13.) And St. Peter tells Christian wives that they may win their husbands to Christ by their "chaste conversation, coupled with fear" (1 Peter iii. 1). "The Scripture" is said to "say" what Sarah here saith (Gal. iv. 30).—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 13. Abraham is comforted in his stern duty by the renewal of the old promises concerning Ishmael (Gen xvii. 20).

Those who are shut out from God's external dispensations are not, therefore, cut off from His mercy. God has His own designs to fulfil in assigning to men a particular place in human history, but no appointment of this kind is intended as a bar to their individual salvation.

The peculiar blessing was all on the side of Isaac, as being the child by whom the promise should be fulfilled. But the question is, whether there is anything to be deduced from Scripture against the *salvability* of the offspring of Hagar. The blessings promised to her are principally of a temporal nature (Gen. xvi. 10, xvii. 20, xxi. 20); but such blessings would have been the greatest curses on the horrible supposition, that all his descendants had been excluded from the possibility of obtaining eternal happiness. As to the character which is given of Ishmael and his posterity (Gen. xvi. 12), whilst it forms a prophetic description of the character and manners of the Turks and Arabians, it determines nothing whatever against their salvability. Such as they are, they will be judged according to their means of knowledge. The inhabitant of the desert will not be judged for his want of civilisation, nor will the child, who has been educated in the errors of Mahometanism, be punished for his want of Christian baptism. It should be remembered that the death of Ishmael is mentioned in Scripture with all the circumstances of that of a pious patriarch (Gen. xxv. 17, 18.—(*Grizfield.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 14-21.

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL IN THE WILDERNESS: THE SORROWS OF THE OUTCASTS.

We have here the sad picture of two persons forcibly driven from their home to wander through the desert. They are cast out upon the world, subject to unknown chances. Here is a pitiable scene of human misery, and yet it is bounded by Divine mercy and compassion. Both the severity and the goodness of God are manifest.

I. The evils they suffered must be charged upon themselves. Their fate seems hard in the extreme. They are suddenly dismissed from that household in which they had lived so long, and sent into the wilderness, but scantily provided for against the dangers and privations of that condition. Yet they could only charge their misfortunes upon themselves. There was *discipline*, but also *punishment*, in their sufferings. They gave grave offence to those whom they were bound to honour and respect, and to whom they owed their position and material comforts. By deriding Isaac, and opposing his claims, they showed a want of faith in God, and submission to His great designs. They offended the *religious* as well as the human feeling of the parents of the child of promise. Their conduct arose from an anti-spiritual disposition. They had the feeling and spirit of persecutors. Had they submitted to God's known will with meekness and resignation, they might have continued to enjoy the privileges and honours of Abraham's household.

II. They were also fulfilling God's purposes concerning human salvation. There is another aspect of their expulsion which must be noted. It was necessary that the family of Ishmael should be separated from that of Isaac. It pleased God—as He often does in the course of His Providence—to work out this design through human perversity and sin. These wanderers were punished for their carnality and wilfulness, but at the same time Providence was using them to prepare the way of the Lord. God had willed it that human salvation should come through one line, and that line must be kept clear and distinct. This was evident from what God had already said to Abraham (ver. 12), who would never have taken such harsh measures if he had not been impelled to it by a clear sense of duty. This act went sore against his feelings, but he was obeying a Divine voice. Thus, while nations and individuals have suffered for their sins, God has, through these sufferings, been all the time accomplishing some further purpose of His will.

III. Yet they were not shut out from the favours and help of Providence. They had grievously sinned, and brought these evils upon them. They were cast out of the family of Abraham, and driven into the wilderness by a Divine decree. But they had not thereby wandered beyond the circle of God's general Providence. God had not willed it that they should take the highest place in His favour, but they were still His creatures and the sheep of His hand. He made them what they were, and they had a claim upon His protection and regard. The mercy of God is not hindered by human transgression, nor limited by His purposes concerning the destiny of nations in history. He who distributes the favours of His Providence according to His purpose and will to families and nations, has uttered no harsh decree against *individuals* to shut them out from salvation. God came to the help of these poor wanderers. 1. *His Providence interfered when they were at their worst extremity.* The water was all spent in the bottle. They were weary, and suffering from the pangs of thirst. The poor mother had laid her child down to die. and in her agony of grief had turned her face away, not able to bear the sight (verse 15, 16). In this extremity "the Angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven" (verse 17). So it has ever been in human history. When man has exhausted all his resources, then God appears and brings help. 2. *His Providence was administered with touches of human tenderness.* There is something most tenderly human in the conduct of the mother in her sad extremity (verse 16). But in this we have the dim shadow of the Divine tenderness. In the words, "What aileth thee, Hagar?" we recognise a voice of compassion human in its strain. Such is the kindness of God in the aspect which it assumes towards man. But that kindness is greater than all our human notions and forms of tenderness; yea, it is better than life. In the Incarnation this human element in the love of God receives a complete expression. The manifestation of God in Christ was a new publication of the fact and doctrine of that Providence which cares tenderly for individuals, and does not lose itself in the vagueness of a universal regard. 3. *His Providence made use of natural means.* "God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water" (verse 19). The well of water was already there, though in her distress she saw it not. Providence gave her the power to use natural resources. No unnecessary miracle is wrought. Such is the method of God's ordinary Providence towards mankind. He who knows and controls the thoughts of all men imparts directing ideas, and teaches men rightly to employ the resources already given. That Power which gives us to see what was before hidden, and rightly to employ it, helps us most effectually.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 14. His "rising early in the morning" in this and similar instances, is a striking proof of the readiness and alacrity with which he made haste to obey the heavenly mandate. To part with his own son was, no doubt, like rending away his own bowels; but being accustomed to obedience, he controls the paternal affection which he could not extinguish. And here is, unquestionably, one of the severest trials of faith and piety, when we are called to subject to the will of God those primary instincts of our nature which are in themselves neither sinful nor harmful. But the children of Abraham are to prepare themselves for such ordeals.—(*Bush*).

The conduct of Abraham, in this instance, seems cruel and unkind. But it must be noted—1. That he acted according to the Divine command. His duty was clearly announced, but the performance of it was painful to his feelings. 2. Hagar, by this act, obtained her freedom. 3. The mother and son were not hereby excluded from the Covenant. Ishmael had been circumcised, and had the Covenant promises. Nor were they excluded from intercourse with Abraham's house (ch. xxv. 9). 4. In this early age it was not a difficult thing to find a livelihood in the course of such a journey. Food could be obtained without injury to anyone. Accordingly we find that Ishmael chose to dwell in the wilderness, where he became an archer. The subsequent history shows that Hagar was able to provide for herself and her son.

The expulsion of Ishmael was a warning for Israel, so far as it constantly relied upon its natural sonship from Abraham.—*Lange.*

Verse 15, 16.—Ishmael was now, no doubt, thoroughly humbled as well as wearied, and therefore passive under his mother's guidance. She led him to a sheltering bush, and caused him to lie down in its shade, resigning herself to despair.—(*Murphy*).

All creature-comforts will fade and fail us, as the brook Cherith dried up whilst the prophet was drinking of it; as those pools about Jerusalem, that might be dried up, with the tramplings of horse and horsemen (2 Kings xix. 24). But they that drink of Christ's water shall never thirst; for it shall be in them (as the widow's oil, or Aaron's ointment) "a well of water springing up to eternal life" (John iv. 14).—(*Trapp*).

Verse 17. We do not read that the lad uttered a distinct voice, calling to heaven for help. But his suffering and perishing condition had a "voice" which God heard and answered.

This was the Angel Jehovah, who appeared to Hagar on a former occasion, (Gen. xvi. 7). God chooses the time when we are in affliction to visit us, and to repeat His mercies.

"Where he is." The Providence of God observes where we are, and the trouble which lies all around us.

Weeping hath a voice. (Psa. vi. 8.) And as music upon the water sounds farther and more harmoniously than upon the land, so prayers joined with tears. These, if they proceed from faith, are showers quenching the devil's cannon-shot; a second baptism of the soul, wherein it is rinsed anew, nay, perfectly cured; as the lame were healed in the troubled waters. Our Saviour raised the young man of Nain, though none sought to him, merely because he was the only son of his mother, a widow, the stay of her life, and staff of her old age.—*(Trapp.)*

Verse 18. Ishmael was to form a nation by himself, and it was therefore necessary that he should leave the family of Abraham. His wandering in the wilderness was the means by which God wrought out His purpose concerning this man. Such is the course of Providence in human affairs. The evils that happen to men are made to work out the designs of God.

The fortunes of a great nation were at this moment depending upon a weak and perishing lad. Thus, from small and insignificant beginnings (as they appear to us), God works His way to the accomplishment of the great things of human history.

Verse 19. Was not the well there before? And might not the afflicted mother have had recourse to it? Was it her blinding tears that hindered her from seeing it? or the apathy of her soul that made her too listless to be on the look-out for it? Is there no trace in all this of unwarrantable impatience and despondency? Ah! she may have been like too many, who, amid life's trials—and the disappointment, perhaps, of their own sinful and carnal hopes—are ready to lay them down and die for want, when there is a well within their reach—the well of which "whosoever drinketh shall never thirst again!" This poor exile forgot how near she was still to Abraham, who would not surely be unmindful of her—how nearer still she was to Abraham's God, who, even if Abraham's gift of food and water fail, can open her heavy eyes and show her a copious well of water in the wilderness.—*(Candlish.)*

Her eyes were opened, and she saw a well of water. Thus God helps us by simple means. Our souls are blessed and nourished, not by the creation of new facts and truths, but by opening our eyes to see those already given. Thus it was with the disciples, "And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him." (Luke xxiv. 31.) Jesus opened the understanding of His disciples that they might understand the Scriptures. Truths were hidden there which they saw not. (Luke xxiv. 45.)

It is possible for men to perish, though full and sufficient help lies all around them, unless God's grace gives them power to discern and use it.

In the most doleful desert of life God can discover to our soul a well of consolation.

It is unnecessary to determine how far this opening of the eyes was miraculous. It may refer to the cheering of her mind and the sharpening of her attention. In Scripture the natural and supernatural are not always set over against each other as with us. All events are alike ascribed to an ever-watchful Providence, whether they flow from the ordinary laws of nature or some higher law of the Divine will.—*(Murphy.)*

Verses 20, 21. God does not forsake men and nations because they are outside of His family, the Church.

He became not only an adept at the use of the bow in hunting, but also employing this as his principal weapon on those occasions, when, according to the prediction, "his hand began to be against every man," etc. (Gen. xvi. 12). The term unquestionably denotes warlike character and practices. It is but another mode of saying that he began to be distinguished for lawless predatory habits, as his descendants have always been. His expulsion from his father's house, and the way of life into which it forced him, would naturally tend to increase any inherent ferocity of temper he may have possessed, and to form and fix that character which was given of him by the angel before he was born. God brings His predictions to pass, not always, nor generally, by miraculous means, but by the operation and concurrence of natural causes. It would seem that he gradually brought himself to bear, and finally to prefer that way of living which had at first been obtruded upon him by the strong hand of necessity; and thus the prophecy entered upon its incipient fulfilment.—*(Bush.)*

Verse 21. Here it is shown that he took up his abode in the wilderness, and led the life of a roving hunter, and adopted the habits of a wilderness man—a "wild man" (Gen. xvi. 16), till at length he and his tribe became a bandit band. That he married a wife out of Egypt is here stated, to prepare us for a sketch of his descendants (Gen. xxv. 12–18), the Bedouin Arabs. This also completed the estrangement of Ishmael's line from that of Isaac, as Egypt was the land of his mother's birth and of heathen superstition. That the mother chose his wife was according to the established usage of Eastern nations for the parent to make the choice of a husband, or a wife, for the children.—*(Jacobus.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 22-34.

ABRAHAM THE FRIEND OF MAN.

This treaty between Abimelech and Abraham brings out that kindness and goodwill towards men for which the Patriarch was as remarkable as for his piety towards God. He was to be known afterwards as the "Friend of God," and no one can be such without being also the friend of man.

I. He yields readily to the request for his friendship. There were lower, as well as higher motives which led Abimelech to seek the friendship of Abraham. He was a heathen king, having little knowledge of the true God, and very imperfect conceptions of human duty. We cannot suppose that he desired the friendship of Abraham purely on the highest grounds. His motives were a mixture of good and evil. 1. *Expediency.* There is a worldly, calculating prudence which takes that course most profitable for the time, and regards not its entire moral bearings. This is expediency considered in its bad sense. There is little doubt but that there was some trace of this worldly policy in the conduct of Abimelech. Abraham had become a rich and powerful man, and was every day increasing in influence. It would be, therefore, greatly to the advantage of this king to seek an alliance with him. There is something here, no doubt, of that selfishness to which our poor human nature is so prone. 2. *The worship of success.* It is the way of the world to idolize success. When men have attained to great prosperity they are credited with many and great virtues, which in humbler ways of life would escape recognition. Men may admire virtue, but they adore worldly splendour and magnificence. The king was not unmindful of the fact that Abraham was a good man and deserved success, yet still the adoration of that success, considered by itself, greatly influenced him in seeking the friendship of a man of such good social standing. 3. *The admiration of goodness.* We must also credit Abimelech with this higher motive. The facts were clearly before him. In the defeat of the four kings, in the twofold deliverance of Sarah, in the miraculous birth of Isaac, in the growing power of the Patriarch, and in the richness of his heritage of promise, Abimelech had full evidence that this man was greatly favoured and blessed of God. There is a certain atmosphere about good and holy men which others immediately detect, and in which they are compelled to feel awe and reverence. Abraham encouraged this request for his friendship, though the motives which prompted it were not altogether pure. He was ready to swear allegiance and constant friendship (verse 24). He knew that it is only from weak beginnings that men can advance to the nobility of goodness. He knew that his special position in the Covenant did not cut him off from the rest of mankind. They, too, stood in certain relations to God, and lay under obligations to God which no facts of depravity and no special favours to individual men could set aside. It was not for himself alone that Abraham was thus favoured and visited. He was destined to become a blessing to all the families of mankind.

II. He undertakes the duties of friendship. He freely accepts all the conditions which Abimelech lays down for him. 1. *True and righteous dealing.* "Swear that thou wilt not deal falsely with me" (verse 23). Lasting friendship can only be raised upon the foundations of truth and justice. 2. *Gratitude for favours shown.* "According to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me" (verse 23). True friendship is always mindful of favours received. Gratitude towards men is a duty as well as towards God, and must be shown when men (even though imperfectly) reflect the kindness of God. 3. *Faithfulness to the faults of a friend.* There was a matter of dispute which must be settled before the treaty can be made. Abraham was careful to point out to Abimelech what seemed to be his fault (verse 25). That openness which shrinks not to point out the faults of another is the duty of true friendship. It is that reproof of the righteous which smites with kind intent. The result of this faithfulness must have been grateful to Abraham, for Abimelech was able to clear himself entirely from blame (verse 26). Thus, in the long run, it is best to be perfectly open and sincere. A clear conscience is the best safeguard of any true and lasting brotherhood amongst men.

III. He recognises the sacredness of friendship. He gives it the sanctions of religion by appealing to God as a witness to his sincerity (verse 24). Abraham needed not to be bound in this way by a solemn outward form, but he submitted to it for the good of future generations. He wished these obligations to be strengthened by the external rites of religion. Even though he had seen fit to pledge his bare word, unaccompanied by any outward form, he would still have regarded the Godward aspects of the relationship into which he was about to enter. As one who lived by faith he could not separate any portion of human life or activity from the control and direction of God.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 22. He "saw that God was with him." Such was the motive which induced this friendly request. Probably the news of the extraordinary birth of Isaac, and of the various incidents which had grown out of it, had reached the court of Abimelech, and become a topic of conversation. "This," he would perhaps say to himself, "is a great man, and a great family, and will become a great nation; the blessing of heaven attends him. It is our wisdom, therefore, to take the earliest opportunity to put ourselves on good terms with him." In proposing this, he was acting more for his interest than he was aware of; for God in blessing Abraham had promised to "bless them that blessed him, and to curse them that cursed him." In making a covenant therefore with Abraham, he was virtually making a covenant with the God of Abraham.—*(Bush.)*

The evident blessing of God upon the righteous raises a feeling of reverence even in the minds of those who are outside the Church.

He who lives a godly and righteous life will have a growing influence, so that, at length, men will regard him with something of awe and veneration. In this way the humblest Christian gains a dignity and power which marks him as one of God's nobility. This is the crown of glory which the world sets upon the head of the righteous.

The fact that God is with a man cannot long remain unknown to others.

Abimelech believed that God had blessed Abraham, upon stronger grounds than those afforded by the sight of his temporal prosperity. God had appeared to him in a dream to interpose on behalf of the patriarch. Isaac had been born by an evident interference of the Divine power, so that the family of Abraham seemed destined to achieve greatness and distinction amongst mankind.

Verse 23, 24. "Swear unto me by God." Such was the solemnity with which he wished the friendship to be confirmed. With this request Abraham complied, though we cannot suppose that he needed to be sworn not to deal falsely; but as posterity was concerned, the more solemn the engagement the better. But why should covenants, promises, oaths be necessary in the commerce of human life? It is, alas, for no other reason than that men are false, treacherous, and perfidious. The manners and customs of past times only serve to convince us that in every age the corruption of man has been so great upon the earth that ordinary obligations will not bind; that without the sanctions of religion neither the sense of honour or justice, or interest, will avail to preserve men in a course of rigid integrity. No other argument is necessary to prove that our nature is depraved than the necessity of solemn appeals to the Deity, making "an oath for confirmation the end of all strife."—*(Bush.)*

The necessities of human society require some condescension on the part of believers.

Abraham quickly consents to so reasonable a request from so honourable a person. The wisdom from above is "easy to be entreated" (James iii. 17). The churl Nabal holds it a goodly thing to hold off. It is but manners to reciprocate: the very publicans can find in their hearts to do good to those that have been good to them" (Matt. v. 46, 47).—*(Trapp.)*

Abraham would readily lend himself to any suggestions which would be likely to promote peace with his neighbours. He who was destined by Providence to bear so prominent a part in the revelation of the Gospel, would be likely to share something of its spirit.

Verse 25. Abraham takes occasion to remonstrate with Abimelech about a well which his people had seized. Wells were extremely valuable in Palestine on account of the long absence of rain between the latter or vernal rain ending in March, and the early or autumnal rain beginning in November. The digging of a well was therefore a matter of the greatest moment, and often gave a certain title to the adjacent fields. Hence the many disputes about wells, as the neighbouring emirs or chieftains were jealous of rights so acquired, and often sought to enter by the strong hand on the labours of patient industry.—*(Murphy.)*

Abraham: A peacemaker. 1. He bears an injury long, without seeking to redress it by forcible means. Men who are disposed to quarrel can easily magnify even the slightest neglect or offence into a gross affront. 2. He is desirous of removing every barrier in the way of peace. He refers now to this matter of the well when Abimelech requests his friendship, in order that there might be nothing to mar it.

Verse 26. The wrong had not been done by him, nor with his consent; it was the act of his servants—that is, his *officers*, who, perhaps, had pretended his authority for their unjust spoliation, than which nothing is more common among the minions and creatures of sovereignty. Subjects are wronged, oppressed, despoiled, and yet their grievances never reach the ears of rulers, because the oppressors find it for their own interest to bar access to all voices but their own. Too often are not only the consciences, but the very senses of princes taken into the keeping of corrupt and unprincipled officials.—(*Bush*).

Suspicion is the bane of friendship, and the sooner it is proved to be groundless the better.

Abimelech was no unworthy example of meekness. He shows no irritation at a reproof which, in point of fact, was unjust. He appreciated the pure motives which prompted it.

Verses 27–32. That these animals were intended for sacrifice seems probable from the last clause of the verse, which informs us that they both made, or, as the Hebrew has it, *cut* a covenant—*i.e.* made a covenant by cutting the victims in pieces. But why the sheep and oxen are said first to have been presented to Abimelech is not so clear, unless it were that Abraham designed to do him greater honour by giving him the animals to offer before the Lord. As if duly mindful of his rank as a subject, and desirous of showing a proper respect to the king, he seems to have studied to give him the precedency in the whole transaction.—(*Bush*).

Abraham lays more stress on a public attestation that he has dug, and is therefore the owner of this well, than on all the rest of the treaty. Seven is the number of sanctity, and therefore of obligation. This number is accordingly figured in some part of the form of confederation; in the present case in the seven ewe lambs, which Abraham tenders, and Abimelech, in token of consent, accepts at his hand. The name of the well is remarkable as an instance of the various meanings attached to nearly the same sound. Even in Hebrew it means the well of seven, or the well of the oath, as the roots of seven, and of the verb meaning to swear, have the same radical letters. Bir es Seba means the well of seven or of the lion.—(*Murphy*).

Thus worthily does the first chapter in the history of treaties open.—(*Kitto*)

The alliance here ratified may be regarded as a prophecy of the all-embracing mercy of the Gospel, whose provisions are for all men, both Jews and Gentiles.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 33, 34.

ABRAHAM, THE GODLY MAN.

Abraham was not merely a religious man—a man of outward forms and observances; he was eminently a godly man. He believed not only certain truths concerning God, but he believed in God—in a living, personal Being upon whom he had centered his faith and hope. His character in this regard comes out clearly in this short historical notice.

1. He makes provision for Divine worship. "Abraham planted a grove in Beer-Sheba," whose grateful shade and seclusion he would use for prayer and worship. And what we are told about the way of his worship shows that it rose above outward forms and ordinances. 1. *It was intelligent.* "He called there on the name of the Lord." The "name," as employed by the sacred writers, is not an indifferent symbol, but stands for the reality. Abraham knew the object of his worship—the faithful, unchangeable God, true to His promises for ever. He was not serving one who inspired only slavish dread, and with whom a breach of ceremony was the highest offence, but a righteous Being who required truth

in the heart and the service of love. His piety has no trace of superstition, but is altogether in accordance with the highest reason. 2. *It was grateful.* The planting of this grove was a kind of special act, in which Abraham was led to review the past with thankfulness. It was an outward monument of the gratitude which he felt in his heart for all God's mercies. He was like Samuel, when he set up a stone between Mizpeh and Shen, and called it Ebenezer, saying, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped us." Thankfulness which finds its voice in praise is an essential part of worship. God is always giving to us, and there are times when our grateful sense of His bounty should rise to the surface and occupy our whole soul. 3. *It was hopeful.* He invoked the name of "the Everlasting God." He looked towards the future with confidence, for he knew that God was sufficient in power, and throughout all time. His expectation was from One who could not die, and who could secure for him a portion beyond this passing world. This is not like the hope of the worldly man, which encloses little, and that passing away. Bounded by this world, nothing lies beyond it but a dreary blank. This was the hope of that eternal life in which God would be always blessing him. Union with such a Being implies immortality, as our Lord teaches us in His application of the truth that God was "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob." The hope of the righteous man has its substantial ground in his faith in God.

II. He is content to be a stranger and pilgrim on the earth. He "sojourned in the Philistines' land many days." He was but a stranger there, and only for a short time. He had no permanent possession in the land. It afforded him but a resting place for a while—his true home elsewhere. In one sense, every man is a pilgrim, for by an inevitable law he is passing on through the world to eternity. But every man does not recognise the fact that this world is not the true home of his soul, and that his mind and heart ought not to rest here. Abraham felt that he was both a pilgrim and a *stranger*. His strong faith in God was leading him each day to things above and beyond this world.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 33. The planting of this long-lived tree, with its hard wood and its long, narrow, thickly-clustered evergreen leaves, was to be a type of the ever-enduring grace of the faithful covenant God.—(*Keil* and *Delitzsch.*)

Abraham was seeking rest and peace, and it was therefore appropriate that he should invoke that name of God which implied His all-sufficiency and unchangeableness.

The consistency of the patriarch's godliness is seen in his making provision for the worship of God at every stage of his pilgrimage.

Verse 34. Moses reports three sacred works of Abraham—1. He laboured. 2. He preached. 3. He bore patiently his long sojourn in a strange land.

Abraham sojourning in the Philistines' land—an image of the Church in the midst of the world.

CHAPTER XXII.

Critical Notes.—1. **God did tempt Abraham.]** Try, prove, or put to the test.—2. **Land of Moriah.]** "A general phrase for the mountainous district of Jerusalem. But this *Moriah* is the same with the site upon which Solomon built the Temple, and was so called (2 Sam. xxiv. 16 17) when the old name was revived on another occasion than this." (See 2 Chron. iii. 1.) (*Jacobus.*)—4. **On the third day.]** "From Beer-Sheba to the Shalem of Melkizedec, near which this hill is supposed to have been, is about 45 miles. If they proceeded 15 miles on the first broken day, 20 on the second, and 10 on the third, they would come within sight of the place early on the third day." (*Murphy.*) *Saw the place afar off.* The Jewish tradition is that the place was pointed out by a luminous cloud.—**5. And come again to you.]** This may have been an expression of faith that God would restore his son, even if actually sacrificed. But more probably it was a device to conceal his purpose from his servants. "Some fancy that his words were a mere excuse without truth, and refer to his dealings at Egypt and at Gerar. Nor would the inconsistency even at such a time be past example. One part of the moral being may be intensely alive, while another is dead and without sensation." (*Alford.*)—**6. And he took the fire in his hand.]** A brand, or torch, kindled at the spot where he left the servants. Therefore there was but a short distance to the place of sacrifice.—**8. God will provide Himself a lamb.]** Heb. "God will see for Himself the lamb. The Heb. has no other word for *provide* than *to see.* The term is the same as in the name of the place given by Abraham, *Jehovah-jireh, i.e.*, God will see, or provide.—**11. The angel of the Lord.]** "The names of God here introduced are worthy of note. It was Elohim, the *Personal* God—in distinction from heathen gods—who demanded the sacrifice—the God whom Abraham worshipped and served. And now it was *the Angel of Jehovah—the Covenant Angel*—who arrested him in the very act. God, as the true God, had the sovereign right to demand all that Abraham had; and yet God Jehovah, as the Covenant God, would not suffer His covenant to fail." (*Jacobus.*)—**12. Now I know that thou fearest God.]** The Heb. word denotes that knowledge which is ascertained by experiment. Elohim is the name of God employed here—the general, not the covenant name. This was the trial of Abraham's God-fearing character.—**13. Behind him a ram.]** Kalisch renders *in the background*, behind the things immediately present. The word never occurs in the O.T. as an adverb of place, but it is likely that it should be so understood here. "The voice from heaven was heard from behind Abraham, who on turning back and lifting up his eyes saw the ram." (*Murphy.*)—**14. In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.]** In the popular proverb there is an allusion to the name *Moriah*, the mountain of vision. This is the probable meaning; but other views are given. Keil gives this sense—"*So that it is said, on the mountain where the Lord appears (yearly)*, from which the name *Moriah* arose." Kalisch: "*On the mount of the Lord His people shall be seen, i.e.*, they shall worship on that mount." Others give the sense—the Lord will be seen there for His people's deliverance. Probably we are not far wrong in taking the following as the general meaning—that this was the spot of God's choice for the manifestation of His visible presence, where the Sanctuary should be erected and sacrifices offered.—**17. Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.]** The LXX. has, "Shall inherit the cities of their adversaries." "The most obvious sense is this—Israel should overcome his enemies and capture their cities, since he should seize and occupy their gates. But the *gate* here points to a deeper meaning. The hostile world has a gate, or gates, in its susceptibilities, through which the believing Israel should enter it. (Psa. xxiv. 7-9.) The following words prove that this is the sense of the words here." (*Lange.*)—**18. And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.]** Heb. "Shall bless themselves, or count themselves blessed." The verb is here in the Hithpael conjugation, which has a reflexive force. In Gen. xii. 2 (the first form of the promise), the verb is in the Niphal conjugation, "shall be blessed."—**20-24.]** "This family register of Abraham's brother is here inserted to prepare the way for the narrative of Isaac's marriage. This was now the next step for the covenant son. And it was God's expressed will that the house of Abraham should not intermarry with the heathen. Here, then, is *Rebekah*, the daughter of Bethuel." (*Jacobus.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-19.

THE TRIAL OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH.

"God did tempt Abraham." We are not to understand the word "tempt" in the unfavourable sense in which it is used of Satan. The meaning is, that God proved the faith and obedience of Abraham by putting them to a severe test. The teaching of this narrative is to be judged by the *issue*, which shows that God did not intend to sanction human sacrifices, but only to give an evident demonstration of Abraham's complete surrender to the Divine will. The command was so given that Abraham could understand it only in one way, *i.e.*, that he was bidden actually to offer up his son in sacrifice. But God had another end in view for his servant, who was by this trial to be selected from the rest of mankind as an extraordinary instance of faith. God meant to prove and to bless him—to set him firmly in that position which he was to hold in the history of the Church. Let us see what light the narrative throws upon the nature and meaning of this trial.

I. It was a trial for which Abraham had been carefully prepared. 1. *By his spiritual history.* His life, as a godly man, was remarkable for intense feeling and a fearless activity. He had been called to a high and singular destiny. He had obeyed that call with unwavering trust and hope in God. The accomplishment of the promises made to him was delayed, so that he was gradually taught to believe the Lord on His simple word. He had been taken into covenant with God. He had submitted to circumcision as the outward seal of that covenant, and in token of that faith which purifieth the heart. He had exercised the offices both of intercessor and prophet. God had at length given to him the child so long promised. By the performance of great duties, and by the experience of extraordinary grace, his character was built up to stability and power. He had acquired more and more a likeness to God. As our word *worth* signifies that which *weareth* well, so we may say that Abraham was a man of great spiritual *worth*. He had qualities of character which wore well—stood the test of time. Here was a strong man who could afford to be put to a severe proof. 2. *By a life of trial.* Ever since Abraham was called of God he had experienced one trial after another. It may be that in his days of spiritual ignorance he had suffered many things in common with those around him, but the life to which God called him brought with it new and peculiar trials. It was a trial when he left his father's house to seek the land of Mesopotamia—trial when in the land of Egypt he feared for the safety and virtue of Sarah—trial when he parted from Lot, though his meekness gained the victory over human passion—trial when he was perplexed with the Divine dealings in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and when his soul could only take refuge in the ultimate rectitude of the Judge of all the earth—trial when he was sorrowfully forced to banish Hagar and her child—trial in his final separation from Ishmael—trial when he found that he had come to old age, and yet had no heir. Abraham was outwardly a prosperous man, and yet what a life of trials and struggles he had to endure! As a spiritual man, he endured the long-continued trial of promises unfulfilled and, to all human appearance, hopeless of fulfilment. It was "*after these things*" that "God did tempt Abraham."

II. It was a trial of remarkable severity. This last trial was the hardest of all. It was emphatically *the* trial of Abraham's faith. We may judge of its severity if we consider—1. *The violence done to his natural feelings.* We read this incident well knowing the issue of it, and are therefore likely to be unmindful of that agony of distress which must have filled the heart of the patriarch on hearing this command. But Abraham did not know that issue. There was nothing before him but that awful word of God which was to be fulfilled with the greatest possible pain to his own feelings. Each successive portion of the command was calculated to fill him with increasing misery and terror. It seems as if each item in his suffering was arranged with cruel ingenuity. "*Take now thy son.*" He had been given by a miracle. Every time the father looked upon him he felt that he was a wonderful child. He was a special gift, most dear and precious. "*Thine only son, Isaac.*" He with whom all the greatness of thy future is connected—thine heir—the hope of nations. "*Whom thou lovest.*" As an only child, and so remarkably given, must be loved. We cannot conceive of a greater violence and outrage done than this to his human feelings as a parent. Moreover, Isaac was to die by his own hand. It would have been some relief to have delivered his beloved son to another to sacrifice him, so that a father might be spared the heart-rending agony of hearing his dying groans. But there was no way of escape. He must himself do the horrid deed. He must come to the appointed place, to the dread moment, and take the knife to slay his son. There was no loophole by which he could slip out of his duty by a sudden turn of circumstances—no possible way of escape. He is bound to face the fact, or to retire. 2. *The violence done to his feelings as a religious man.* Abraham owed certain duties to his son and to his God. Now these two duties clashed with each other, raising a conflict in his soul of the most terrible kind. It seemed as if conscience and God were at variance, and this to a religious mind must give rise to painful perplexity. Abraham might well doubt the Divine origin of the command. Could it possibly have come from God, who had forbidden murder as the very highest of crimes? Was not such a command contrary to the character of that God who is love? Did not God Himself promise that in Isaac all the families of the earth should be blessed, and if he was thus to be untimely slain how could such a promise be fulfilled? It seemed as if the very ground of all his hope was gone. Such doubts as these must have passed through the mind of Abraham, even though they were momentary and other considerations prevailed.

III. This trial was endured in the spirit of an extraordinary faith. The difficulties which Abraham felt, the doubts which must have raised a storm in his mind, the overwhelming trials of his heart—these are not told us in the Bible. We have only the simple fact that his faith was equal to the occasion. His spiritual strength was severely tested, but it had not given way. He had that heroic faith which could overcome all difficulties, and of this the course of the narrative affords abundant evidence. 1. *His obedience was unquestioning.* In this account the sacred writer makes no distinct reference to his *faith*. The thing insisted upon is his *obedience*. "Because thou hast done this thing." "Because thou hast obeyed my voice." Thus faith and obedience are one in essence, and we may employ one word or the other merely to describe the same thing from different points of view. In the same way we may speak of life, considered either in its principle or in its results. For faith is no dead sentiment, but a living power which is bound to give all the manifestations of life. The evidence that a man has life is that he is able to work. Where there is this self-determining activity there is life. Thus Abraham's faith was made manifest by his prompt and unhesitating obedience. 2. *His obedience was complete.* He had nothing reserved, but gave up all to God. He did not devise an ingenious plan of escape from the hard duty, but made every possible provision that the deed should not fail to be done. He did not tell Sarah, for the mother's heart would have pleaded hard and turned him from the steadiness of his purpose. Nor did he tell Isaac till the dreadful moment came. He took care that nothing should interfere with the carrying out of what was to him the will and purpose of God. All this shows that he *meant* to do the deed commanded. Had he known the issue of the event it would have been no sacrifice. But he expected to come back from the awful scene a childless man. Therefore his act, though interrupted at the critical moment, was a real sacrifice. There was a complete surrender of his will, and that is the life and power of sacrifice. 3. *His obedience was marked by humility.* There was no display of his heroic earnestness and devotion. He required no witnesses to the deed. He had no consciousness that he was doing any noble act. Abraham arose early in the morning and saddled his ass. When he arrived at the foot of Mount Moriah he left his servants there, and went on alone with Isaac. All was to be done in secret. He had caught the spirit of that precept which our Lord lays down when He commands secrecy to be observed in our prayers, alms, and sacrifices. 4. *His obedience was inspired by trust in a personal God.* He had overwhelming difficulties to contend with, but he knew that he had to deal with God Himself, and that, in the end, all would be well. He therefore cast himself hopefully upon the future, believing that God in some way would accomplish His promises. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us how he was sustained by the belief that God could raise the dead. (Heb. xi. 12–19). The eye of his faith looked beyond this world to the things which are not seen and which are eternal. (2 Cor. iv. 18).

IV. God rewarded his faithful endurance of the trial. 1. *By taking the will for the deed.* Abraham was permitted to proceed just so far as was necessary *to test his obedience,* and then God restrained his hand from the awful deed. The God of infinite pity never intended that the deed should be done. "Lay not thine hand upon the lad" is the final decree. The thing which God required was only the complete surrender of the father's will. Abraham was spared the *outward form* of the sacrifice, for he had offered it already, by his real intention, in the depths of his soul. 2. *By renewing His promises.* There was nothing new in the promises given to Abraham after this trial. They were the same as God had given many years before. God had done and promised for Abraham all that He intended to do and promise. And so it is with all the children of faith. The old promises unfold more and more and yield new riches, but they remain the same unchanging Word of God. 3. *By turning the occasion of the trial into a revelation of the day of Christ.* There is little doubt that our Lord referred to this event when He said, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad." (John viii. 56). The saints of the old dispensation looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, but it appears to have been the peculiar privilege of Abraham to see the day of Christ. Abraham saw the chief event in our Lord's life—His atoning sacrifice—vividly represented before him. Abraham is made to stand upon Mount Moriah, which, as some think, is the very spot afterwards called the Hill of Calvary. There, after a manner, he sees actually transacted the scenes which we Christians associate with that memorable place. (1) *He sees represented the sacrifice of the only-begotten and well-beloved Son of God.* Abraham erects the altar, lays the wood in order, binds Isaac, takes the knife and stretches forth his hand to slay his son. His own love as a parent must have been an affecting representation to him of the love of the Infinite Father. And yet Abraham's stern devotion to duty represents that love of God which spared not His own Son, but made Him to be a sacrifice for us. (2) *There is suggested to him the idea of substitution.* A ram is substituted in the stead of Isaac. Thus Christ was a ransom found for the doomed and condemned—an acceptable victim put in their place. (3) *The resurrection of Christ and His return to glory are also represented.* Abraham verily received Isaac from the dead, and welcomed him to his embrace. So did the Son of God return to His Father, though not without sacrifice—not without blood. He endured that death which Isaac only underwent in a figure. Abraham looked forward to that restored state of things which the resurrection of Christ has proved to be possible. He saw how death could spring from life, how joy could be distilled from sorrow, and suffering end in glory. Learn: (1) *That the most distinguished of God's servants are often subjected to the greatest trials.* (2) *That trials test the strength and spirituality of our faith.* (3) *That trials well endured set spiritual truths in a clearer and more affecting light.* They give us clearer views of the day of Christ, of His atoning work and its blessed issues. We are encouraged to cast ourselves entirely upon the future. The spiritual world opens up before us, and we feel the worth and preciousness of the unseen. We are made to know that there is, beyond this short life of ours, an enduring world where all shall be restored again.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Abraham had been assailed by many temptations from various quarters, but out of them all God delivered him. Now God Himself becomes his tempter; not, however, to lead him into sin, but to test his spirit of prompt and unquestioning obedience.

"After these things." After five and

twenty years of patient waiting; after the promise had been frequently repeated; after hope had been raised to the highest pitch; yea, after it had been actually turned into enjoyment; and when the child had lived long enough to discover an amiable and godly disposition.—(*Fuller.*)

God puts us upon our trial to "do us good in our latter end" (Deut. viii. 16). Satan ever seeks to do us hurt. He, when he comes to tempt, comes with his *sieve*, as to Peter (Luke xxiii. 21); Christ with His "fan" (Matt. iii. 12). Now a fan casteth out the worst and keepeth in the best; a sieve keepeth in the worst and casteth out the best. Christ by his trials purgeth our corruption, and increaseth grace; but the devil, if there be any ill thing in us, confirmeth it; if faith, or any good thing in us, he weakeneth it.—(*Trapp.*)

Life is all temptation. It is sad to think so, but surely we would not have it otherwise. For dark and hard as the dispensation seems, trial here is indispensable for the purifying of the soul. There is no strength or real goodness except that which is wrought out of circumstances of temptation. There is no strength in cloistered virtue, no vigour without trial. In some trials Abraham fell; in others he came off victorious. Out of failure was organised strength. Trials do not become lighter as we go on. It was "*after these things* that God did tempt Abraham." What! no repose? No place of honourable quiet for the "friend of God," full of years? No. There are harder and yet harder trials even to the end. The last trial of Abraham's was the hardest of all to bear. For the soldier engaged in *this* world's warfare, there is an honourable asylum for his declining years; but for the soldier of the cross there is no rest except the grave.—(*Robertson.*)

"After these things." The enjoyment of peculiar blessings may be secured by unexpected trials. It is part of God's way in Providence that life should be a chequered scene, joy and sorrow intermingled, sown with good and evil, light and darkness. From this—as it appears—disordered mixture many blessings arise. The passive virtues of self-denial and humility are cultivated, and the character acquires features of consistency and worth. In spiritual things God prepares for trial by eminent enjoyments. Moses beheld the burning bush, and received special manifestations of God's favour. Thus he was prepared for the toils and trials of his embassy to Egypt. Jacob beheld the vision at Bethel, and this prepared him for his long servitude to Laban. Elijah was met by an angel in the wilderness, and received the cake baked on coals and the cruse of water, like a sacrament before suffering, and in the strength of it went fasting forty days. The disciples saw the glory of Christ on the Mount before they witnessed His agony in the garden.

Verse 2. "And He *said.*" This was not a temptation of the ordinary kind, by the events and circumstances of life. It was the *word* of God that tried Abraham.

The fundamental principle of the Mosaic code, is that the first-born is consecrated to God in memory of the salvation of Israel's first-born from the slaughter that came upon the households of Egypt (Ex. xiii. 2; xxii. 28). The substitution of an animal victim for the first-born son was allowed, but it is placed thus in the right light; for this adoption by God of the *imperfect* for the *perfect* (the animal for the son) is precisely the meaning of the Mosaic system. It is only the highest idea of this picture in the death of the only-begotten and well-beloved Son of the Father, which is the basis of the Gospel message and of our Christian hope (Rom. viii. 32).—(*Jacobus.*)

Here was everything to make this command a trial, and a heavy one. "Take thy *son*," not thy servant nor the sheep of thy folds; but, verily, the fruit of thy body. Thine only Isaac. "Offer him," not see him offered. In a burnt-offering the victim was to be cut in pieces, the separate parts laid in order on the wood, and the whole burnt with fire. All this long and mournful ceremony was to be performed by Abraham himself. So we, in like manner, may be called upon to make sacrifices which are terribly real. Christ speaks of cutting off a right arm, or plucking out a right eye. There are trials which touch our quick sensibilities—dishonour done to our good name—or the sorrows which fall upon those near and dear to us. God knows and observes the extent of our sacrifice.

Verse 3. He murmured not, nor took counsel with flesh and blood. He waited not to consult with Sarah, nor listened to the misgivings of his own mind. The command was clear and the obedience prompt. The trial was long and painfully drawn out. Towards God, it was endured in the spirit of faith and loving obedience; towards men, in mournful silence.

Reason and feeling were against Abraham. The word of God was his sole warrant.

That which he must do he will do: he that hath learned not to regard the life of his son had learned not to regard the sorrow of his wife.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

Verse 4. A great while for him to be plodding ere he came to the place. But we must conceive that his brains were better busied than many of ours would have been therewhile. We must not weigh the crop, for then it will prove heavy; we must not chew the pill but swallow it whole, else it will prove bitter; we must not plod too much, but ply the throne of grace for a good use and a good issue of all our trials and tribulations.—(*Trapp.*)

In the three days' journey there was time given for reflection. The pleadings of nature would be heard, parental affection would revive and assert itself. The society and conversation of Isaac would strengthen the voice of nature against the hard command. Thus the struggle of faith is not short and momentary, but prolonged.

The place was probably pointed out by a luminous cloud, pre-intimative of the Shekinah, which rested upon it. Such is the tradition of the Jews. When God bade Abraham go to the place He would tell him of, and offer his son, he asked how he should know it; and the answer was, Wheresoever thou seest my glory, there will I stay and wait for thee. And accordingly now he beheld a pillar of fire reaching from heaven to earth, and thereby knew that this was the place.—(*Bush.*)

As this sacrifice was typical of that of Christ, so here may be a reference to the third day of His resurrection.

Verse 5. This reminds us of Our Lord in Gethsemane, when He said to His disciples, "Tarry ye here while I go and pray yonder." Going into such an agony, He could not admit others to go with Him. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness." They would not understand the strange proceedings, and would only embarass Him in it all. —(*Jacobus.*)

He wished not to be interrupted. In hard duties and severe trials we should consider that we have enough to struggle with in our minds without having any interruptions from other quarters. Great trials are best entered upon with but little company.—(*Fuller.*)

We worship God truly when we yield obedience.

Verse 6. Is this a type of our blessed Lord, the New Testament Isaac, bearing His cross? It was a trial to Isaac as well as to Abraham. The son of promise must bear His cross of sacrifice. "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquities of us all." (Isa. liii. 6.) Isaac's faith also triumphs. He inquires, but goes meekly on. It is to be observed that Isaac was not now a mere boy, but a young man able to carry the amount of wood necessary to consume the offering. *Josephus* makes him to have been twenty-five years old. The *Rabbins* make him older. Some insist that his age was thirty-three, corresponding with that of the antitype, who was of this *average age* of man when He died for man's sin.—*(Jacobus.)*

Isaac was ignorant of that awful part which he had to take in this sacrifice, but Jesus knew from the beginning that He must be offered up.

Verse 7, 8. If Abraham's heart could have known how to relent, that question of his dear, innocent, and pious son had melted it into compassion. I know not whether that word, "my father," did not strike Abraham as deep as the knife of Abraham could strike his son.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

The tenderness of this scene is only to be surpassed by those of Gethsemane and Calvary. But with the antitype that tenderness is heightened beyond our power to feel or know. If we think of man's feeling towards another as involving strong love and self-sacrifice, we are obliged to say of God's feeling towards us, "How much more!"

How, like the inquiry of the Great Sacrifice, "He looked, and there was none to help, and he wondered *that there* was no intercessor." But Jesus answered that question. "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not (of bulls and goats), but a body hast thou prepared me." (Heb. x. 5.)—*(Jacobus.)*

"God will provide." This is one of the "faithful" sayings of the Old Testament. How many have been comforted by this thought in seasons of deep trial, when all seemed to be lost! When reason gives no light, and faith holds on to the bare command, with no encouraging prospect in sight, the soul can only point to God and rest satisfied.

In the sacrifice of Christ for sin God has provided for Himself "a lamb for a burnt offering." This incident shows us, *in what lies the value of that sacrifice*, and *with what feelings we should regard it. I. The sacrifice which God approves must be of His own appointing.* Men have everywhere, and at all times, felt their need of a religion. They have a consciousness of sin, and they must, therefore, propitiate God. Hence the universal practice of offering sacrifice. The tendency amongst mankind has been towards excessive zeal in outward sacrifices and offerings, and to forget the fact that God requires self-renonciation. Man's religion has "devotion's every grace except the heart." But, "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." "God will provide Himself a lamb." He did not require the blood of Isaac, but the full surrender of Abraham's will. He had provided a richer offering than that, the sacrifice of a stronger and more all-embracing love. "God *so* loved *the world* that He gave," etc. The terms of salvation cannot be discovered by us; we can only know them as the revealed will of God who appoints His own sacrifice. All else is will worship. *II. The sacrifice which God has provided is supremely worthy of acceptance, and graciously suited to our condition.* Multitudes of the human race have proved the worth of the sacrifice which God has appointed. It has been the joy of faith, and will be for ever the song of heaven. It is the Everlasting Gospel. The value of this sacrifice may be gathered from what it has done. 1. *It has reconciled us to God.* 2. *It has procured the forgiveness of sins.* 3. *It opens the way to endless bliss.* Heaven becomes the purchased possession, and the central object there is the "Lamb slain" who has procured it for us. *III. The acceptance of the sacrifice God has provided is the turning point of man's spiritual history.* 1. It includes all the rest—*repentance, faith, love, obedience.* 2. *It gives efficiency to all the rest.* 3. *It is the true test of spiritual character.* God's sacrifice must be accepted by faith; and faith, in the Gospel sense of the term, is the most real and essential difference, the most vital mark of separation between man and man. This is the touchstone of the innermost nature of our heart.

Verse 9. This was a place of trial both of God and man. Abraham's faith was tried, and the gracious purposes of God towards the human race received visible proof. Both the father of the faithful and the faithful covenant of God are here revealed.

He bound Isaac. Here is also the proving of Isaac's faith. Has he indeed trusted God to provide the lamb? Then what if God choose him for the victim? We hear no complaint from the son of promise. "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter"—for a voluntary death, so far as we can judge from the record. It was not merely filial affection and pious obedience to the parent; it was implicit trust in God, on the ground set forth and accepted; that God will see—see to it and provide. Isaac made no resistance. We see in him the unresisting Son of God—Lamb of God—sacrifice for sinners. Isaac on the altar was sanctified for his vocation in connection with the history of salvation. He was dedicated there as the first-born, and "the dedication of the first-born, which was afterwards enjoined in the law, was fulfilled in him."—(*Jacobus.*)

Verse 10. The deed is virtually done when the will shows firm determination. God, who looketh upon the heart, regardeth the sacrifice as already made. "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, *offered up Isaac*" (Heb. xi. 17). He will take the will for the deed, but never the deed for the will.

Verse 11. When we cannot see on any side a way of escape, then God comes and often shows us a wonderful deliverance.—*(Lange.)*

A moment more, and the victim would have been smitten; but in that moment the awful mandate is countermanded. A voice, too familiar to Abraham not to be at once recognised as that of God Himself, addresses him out of heaven, and averts the dire catastrophe. Though termed an angel, yet it is evident from the manner in which He here speaks of Himself, and from what is said (verse 12-16), that He was not a created being, but was no other than the Divine personage so often introduced into the sacred narrative under the title of the Angel-Jehovah, the Angel of the covenant.—(*Bush.*)

And said "Abraham, Abraham." Twice for haste's sake; yet not at all till the very instant. When the knife was up the Lord came. God delights to bring His people to the mount, yea, to the very brow of the hill till their feet slip, and then delivers them. He reserves His holy hand for a dead lift. Only be sure you look to your calling; for it was otherwise with Jephthah. (Judges xi).—*(Trapp.)*

The posture of attention to the voice of God will bring us out of all perplexity and trouble. The same voice which called us to duty will speak again, when we are in a great strait, and open up a way for our escape.

The deliverance by which God rescues His people in great emergencies is often as remarkable as the trial itself is severe. Things were brought now to a dreadful crisis, but the deliverance was sudden and complete.

Verse 12. It is the province of God our Saviour to bring that deliverance which man can neither conceive of nor procure, and to bring it at the right time. Christ appeared when the human race was old enough to learn by sad experience that man was unable to save himself without a Deliverer from heaven.

In the work of redemption God has shown that the purpose of the Redeemer is not to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

Here we have the evidence of a voice from heaven that God does not accept of human victims. Man is morally unclean, and therefore unfit for a sacrifice. He is, moreover, not in any sense a victim, but a doomed culprit, for whom the victim has to be provided. And for a typical sacrifice, that cannot take away but only shadow forth the efficacious sacrifice, man is neither fit nor necessary. The lamb without blemish, that has no penal or protracted suffering, is sufficient for a symbol of the real atonement. The intention, therefore, in this case was enough, and that was now seen to be real.—(*Murphy.*)

The voice of God was never so welcome, never so sweet, never so seasonable as now. It was the trial that God intended, not the fact. Isaac is sacrificed, and is yet alive; and now both of them are more happy in what they would have done, than they could have been distressed if they had done it. God's charges are oftentimes harsh in the beginnings and proceeding, but in the conclusion always comfortable. True spiritual comforts are commonly late and sudden; God defers, on purpose that our trials may be perfect, our deliverance welcome, our recompenses glorious.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

God required not an experiment in order to gain knowledge, but only to make His knowledge evident to men—to teach the human conscience by *example* as well as by principle—to place Abraham in history for all time, as a tried and approved believer.

The underlying principle of Abraham's spiritual experience was the complete surrender of himself, and all that was near and dear to him, to God.

It is not distinctly said that it was the *faith* of Abraham which was thus manifested, but his *fear of God*—that filial fear which springs of love, and produces the fruits of obedience.

St. Paul's epistles teach us that believing and obeying are exhibitions of one and the same spiritual character of mind. For instance, he says that Abraham was accepted by *faith*, yet St. James says he was accepted by works of *obedience*. The meaning is clear, that Abraham found favour in God's sight, *because he gave himself* up to Him. This is faith, or obedience, whichever we please to call it. No matter whether we say Abraham was favoured because his faith embraced God's *promises*, or because his obedience cherished God's commands, for God's commands are promises, and His promises commands to a heart devoted to Him; so that, as there is no substantial difference between command and promise, so there is likewise none between obedience and faith. Perhaps it is scarcely correct even to say that faith comes first and obedience follows as an inseparable second step, and that faith, as being the first step, is accepted. For not a single act of faith can be named but what has in it the nature of obedience; that is, implies making an effort and a consequent victory.—(*J. H. Newman.*)

As a sinner, Abraham was justified by faith only; but, as a professing believer, he was justified by the works which his faith produced.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 13. This was, in fact, an accomplishment of what Abraham himself had a little while before unwittingly predicted. In reply to Isaac's question, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" he had said, "My son, God will provide Himself with a burnt offering." By this answer he merely intended to satisfy his son's mind for the present, till the time should come for making known to him the command which he had received from God, in which command that provision was actually made. But now, through the miraculous interposition of Heaven, and the substitution of the ram in Isaac's place, it had been literally verified in a way which he himself had never contemplated.—(*Bush*).

He that made that beast brings him thither, fastens him there. Even in small things there is a great providence. —(*Bp. Hall*).

Animal sacrifice was accepted instead of human. This was the great principle of the Mosaic economy, which pointed forward to the only acceptable substitute for man, the Lamb of God's own providing.

Verse 14. *Jehovah-jireh*. 1. A memorial of God's great goodness. 2. A promise for the future; that He will give deliverance, in times of extremity, to those who trust in Him.

The passage is undoubtedly meant to inform us that the incident here related was so remarkable, the Divine intervention so illustrious, that it gave rise to the well-known proverbial saying, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen;" an expression of which, perhaps, the nearest equivalent in English is the familiar apothegm, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." The circumstance plainly teaches us, that whatever God has at any time done for the most favoured of His saints may be expected of us now, as far as our necessities call for it. Of all the events related in the Old Testament, scarcely anyone was so peculiar and so exclusive as this. Who besides Abraham was ever called to sacrifice his own son? Who besides him was ever stayed by a voice from heaven in the execution of such a command? And yet, this very event was made the foundation of the proverb before us; and from this, particular and exclusive as it was, all believers are taught to expect that God will interpose for them in like manner in the hour of their extremity.—(*Bush*).

On this same Mount Moriah, in the fulness of time, the only-begotten Son of God was offered up. Abraham verily saw the day of Christ.

The summit of the believer's afflictions is the place of his deliverance.

Verses 15–18. Here we find the covenant-promise repeated to Abraham, much the same as at first, yet with important variations. It is the same spiritual grant which the apostle designates as God's "preaching beforehand the Gospel unto Abraham" (Gal. iii. 8; Rom. iv. 16, 17). It is the promise of salvation to all nations through Abraham. Only here (1) it is the promise made with the additional sanction of *the oath* of God. (Heb. vi. 18) (2) It is here expressed that the salvation of all people is to come through the *seed* of Abraham; whereas in chap. xii. 3, it was "*In thee,*" etc. This was fitting, after the offering of Isaac, which brought the promised seed to view so distinctly. St. Paul argues, by the Spirit, that "*the seed*" is Christ. The prediction and promise here given is, therefore, the very crown of all promises —as Abraham is father of the faithful. (3) This concluding crowning form of the promise to Abraham dwells chiefly upon the *seed;* while, in other passages, it had been the *land* of promise more especially, and Abraham more personally. This is quite in accordance with the gradual unfolding of the Gospel revelation. The Messianic idea is more and more distinctly brought into view. The *multiplying of the seed* of Abraham here promised, to one who had now, in his old age, only the first-born of Hagar and Sarah, looks beyond mere natural posterity to the spiritual progeny, which should become innumerable.—(*Jacobus.*)

The multitude of his seed has a double parallel in the stars of heaven and the sands of the ocean. They are to possess the gate of their enemies, that is, to be masters and rulers of their cities and territories. The great promise, that all the nations should be blessed in his seed, was, at first, given absolutely without reference to his character. Now it is confirmed to him as the man of proof, who is not only accepted as righteous, but proved to be actually righteous after the inward man; *because thou hast obeyed my voice.* In hearing this transcendent blessing repeated on this momentous occasion, Abraham truly saw the day of the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, the Son of Man. We contemplate him now with wonder as the Man of God, manifested by the self-denying obedience of a regenerate nature, entrusted with the dignity of the patriarchate over a holy seed, and competent to the worthy discharge of all its spiritual functions.—(*Murphy.*)

The conquests of the seed of Abraham are those of the Christian Church, of which it is said that, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 18).

The adherents of non-Christian systems of belief are more numerous than those who have embraced the religion of Christ. But these are the religions of nations which have no future. The nations of the earth are blessed in the seed of Abraham, for He who was emphatically such leads the way in the world's progress.

The promises of God enlarge in successive revelations. To Adam, Christ was promised as the bruiser of the serpent; to Abraham, as the source of blessing to all nations.

What God had at the outset granted

out of free grace alone, and unconditionally, He now confirms as the reward of Abraham's act of faith. This faith which He had created, fostered, and proved, had now brought forth its fruits. God first promises, and by His revelation awakens faith in the heart. He then crowns with reward the works of this faith, which is the result of His grace.—(*Gerlach.*)

Abraham believed in promises which could only be realised long after his death. Though rewarded for obedience he must still live by faith.

The promise to Abraham is the *third* great patriarchal promise, and it is made to the *third* head of the race. Noah's prediction of blessings upon Shem, and through Shem upon Japhet, is here taken up and expanded. To this Shemite a further Messianic promise is made, even when the line of Shem had become idolatrous. The great point of the promise is—(1.) That blessings should come upon the whole human family through Abraham's seed. Abraham must have understood that these blessings were *spiritual*, and that it was by the diffusion of true religion that he should become such a universal blessing. So Peter explains the promise that it was fulfilled in the advent and work of Christ (Acts iii. 25, 26). Paul declares that in this promise God preached beforehand the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, etc. (Gal. iii. 8–16.) The promise is, therefore (2), Of a universal religion for man, to come through Abraham. This is the great idea of the Bible. The unity of the race and their brotherhood in Christ, the seed of Abraham, is set forth in both Testaments—Christ all and in all. (3.) This glorious result for men is by means of a chosen family and people, who are to train posterity according to the covenant seal. Christianity did not spring out of Judaism as a natural growth, for the Jewish religion had become corrupt, and so it battled the idea of such a universal Church as Christ came to establish. The idea was of God, and the plan thus prosecuted can be accounted for only as the plan of God, running through the ages, and the golden thread in all history. No heathen philosophy, nor any other religious system, ever proposed this spiritual blessedness of mankind as the object and end.—(*Jacobus.*)

Verse 19. Abraham's return from the scene of his trial. 1. With the blessed consciousness of duty done. He had obeyed the voice of God, and had stifled every other voice. 2. With all his former blessings made more sacred and secure. He had given up his beloved Isaac, and behold he has him still, more dear than ever now, and like a fresh gift from God. No sacrifice is made for Him, but it is rendered back more than an hundred fold, and the offerer is thereby exalted and blest. We have that most surely which we resign to God. When we make our possessions His, then alone do we enjoy their full benefits. When we keep them back from God we lose them. "He that saveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." 3. With fresh promises and encouragements, God was better to him than all his fears, yea, than all his hopes.

Isaac had never been so precious to his father if he had not been recovered from death; if he had not been as miraculously restored as given. Abraham had never been as blessed in his seed if he had not neglected Isaac for God. The only way to find comfort in an earthly thing is to surrender it in a believing carelessness into the hands of God.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

Abraham had now arrived at the summit of his spiritual vigour and experience. He was, henceforth, to be the grand example of faith.

In the person of Abraham is unfolded that spiritual process by which the soul is drawn to God. He hears the call of God, and comes to the decisive act of trusting in the revealed God of mercy and truth; on the ground of which act he is accounted righteous. He then rises to the successive acts of walking with God, covenanting with Him, and at length withholding nothing that he has or holds dear from Him. Here are the essential characteristics of the man who is saved through acceptance of the mercy of God. Faith in God (ch. xv.), repentance towards Him (ch. xvi.), and fellowship with Him (ch. xviii.), are the three great turning points of the soul's returning life. They are built upon the effectual call of God (ch. xii.), and culminate in unreserved resignation to Him (ch. xxii.). With wonderful facility has the sacred record descended in this pattern of spiritual biography from the rational and accountable race to the individual and immortal soul, and traced the footsteps of its path to God.—(*Murphy*).

Verses 20–24. The genealogy here given is undoubtedly introduced in order to make way for the following account of Isaac's marriage to Rebekah, a daughter of the family of Nahor. It was contrary to the design of heaven that the family of Abraham should intermarry with the heathen races among whom he now dwelt, and to add to the recent tokens of the Divine favour, he is now cheered by the welcome tidings of the prosperity of his brother's house, in which he would not fail to perceive how kindly God was preparing the way for the higher happiness of his son and the further fulfilment of His promises. —(*Bush*).

CHAPTER XXIII.

Critical Notes.—**1. The years of the life of Sarah.]** Heb. pl. *lives*. Probably used as the plural of eminence. Some of the Jewish expositors refer the expression to three stages in the life of Sarah.—**2. Hebron.]** Same as *Kirjath-Arba*. "Here Abraham had resided, and, having been absent some forty years, had returned. This was a most ancient city, the earliest seat of civilised life, having been built seven years before *Zoan*, the oldest capital of Egypt (Num. xiii. 22). It is now a town of some prominence, but chiefly notable for the mosque built over the tomb of Sarah." *(Jacobus.)* *In the land of Canaan*. Hebron was situated in the hill country of Judea, about thirty miles south of Jerusalem.—**3. Stood up from before his dead.]** "Abraham must be thought of as 'weeping over the face' of Sarah (2 Kings xiii. 14), and he rises up *from the face of his dead*." *(Alford.)* *The sons of Heth*. Descendants of Heth, the son of Canaan, a grandson of Ham, elsewhere called the Hittites. They were Canaanites. From them Esau took wives. (Gen. xxvi. 34, 35.)—**6. My lord.]** A title of respect equivalent to our sir. *A mighty prince*. Heb. *A prince of God*. The Heb. affixed the name of God to words to denote excellence of the superlative degree. Thus great mountains, great cedars, are called "mountains of God," "cedars of God." (Gen. xxx. 8; Psa. lxxx. 10.) **8. If it be your mind.]** Heb. *If it be with your soul*. Soul often occurs in the O.T. in the sense of will, or desire, or inclination. (Psa. xxvii. 12; Psa. cv. 22.)—**9. The cave of Machpelah.]** In this eastern land it was customary to bury in caves, natural or artificial. *Machpelah*. Heb. *The two-fold cave*. The expression, though descriptive of its *form*, is here used as a proper name. The name was also applied to the whole field, including the cave. A mosque is now built over the spot. *In the end of his field*. *Field* denotes a larger extent of land than it does with us, and frequently signifies a territory, or large tract of country. "Jacob fled to the *country* of Syria." Heb. "*field* of Syria." *For as much money as it is worth*. Heb. *For full silver*, *i.e.*, full money. The word *silver* is often used by the sacred writers to signify money.—**11. The field give I thee, and the cave that is therein.]** This was a formal expression after the Oriental fashion, refusing to name a fixed price, and offering as a gift, while at the same time expecting an equivalent for it.—**16. Shekels.]** From the verb *shakal*, to weigh. Hence is derived the English word *scales*. Among the Jews *shekel* was used both for a weight and a coin. There were then no stamped coins. The first use of coins has been ascribed to the Phœnicians. *Current money with the merchant*. It is still the custom to weigh money in the East, even where it is stamped, in order to see if it is of full weight; "current money with the merchant."—**17. And the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah which was before Mamre, the field and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about.]** "This minute specification seems like a recital of the very formula of sale, and shows the solemn significance of the whole proceeding. By the expression which was in (the) Machpelah, it would seem as if the name belonged not to the cave only, but also to the district or property." *(Alford.)* *Before Mamre*. Probably signifies to the eastward of it. *Were made sure*. Heb. *Stood for a possession*. No mention is made of any document, and the title was probably established by a public proclamation of the sale, made in the gate. **20. And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession.]** The validity of his title is again recited on account of the importance of the fact.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1, 2.

ABRAHAM IN THE HOUSE OF MOURNING.

Abraham, who had been tried by the word of the Lord, is now tried in the ordinary course of Providence. His wife dies. The desire of his eyes is stricken down by his side. We now find him in the "house of mourning." He had long known God, and had been familiar with spiritual truth, and therefore would not fail to lay to heart the solemn teachings of such an event as this. What lessons, then, would such a man learn in this "house of mourning?"

I. That in view of the awful fact of death, the littleness of human life is seen. Abraham, at such a time as this, would naturally dwell upon the strange and eventful history of that life which had just closed. Full as it was of wonderful experiences and varied incident, yet, in the face of this awful fact of death, these things seemed as though they had never been. They seemed to depart for ever, like a shadow that passes over a field of corn. When death comes, human life appears to be stripped of all substance, and to be only like the memory of a dream. However long a man may live, truly his days are few and evil. For when time is once gone it matters not how long it has been. All the distinctions which are among men, of learning and ignorance, riches and poverty, high and low estate, vanish before this common lot, mortality. Life passes on quickly to its close, and then, to all human seeming, disappears. How rapid was the succession of events in the life of Sarah! A few chapters back, and we read of her marriage; then of the birth of her child; and now we read the account of her death and funeral. This rapid passing over a long history arises, as we know, from the brevity of Scripture biography; yet herein human life is truly represented. Our life, after all, consists of but a few chapters. A baptism, then a wedding; and pass a few more years at most, then a funeral. Such are the short and simple heads of our mortal story. And when the end comes, what a poor and despicable thing life seems! Abraham learned further:—

II. **To realise the fact of his own mortality.** "The living know that they shall die." We all accept the fact of our mortality, but we seldom realise it until death strikes down a near object, and wounds our own heart. When those loved ones die, whose lives have been bound up closely with our own, then death becomes awfully credible. Men tell us of the horror they have felt upon their first sensations of the shock of an earthquake. They felt as if this firm-set earth was no longer to be trusted. They were safe nowhere. And so, when the stroke of death falls upon those whom we have long and deeply loved, the feeling rushes upon us suddenly, that after all this solid life is hollow. Our first thought is, "I may be the next to go." When Abraham saw his wife lying dead, the thought of his own mortality would be forced upon him as it never had been before. Such is the estimate which must be formed of human life when seen from this side. But a godly man could not rest in such a despairing view of human life and destiny. Therefore he learned also:—

III. To feel that there is a life beyond. Abraham lived the life of faith. He knew that his soul was linked with the ever-living God who would be the eternal possession of those who trust in Him. The soul that partakes of the Divine nature cannot die. Abraham had a fixed belief in a future life, but there are moments when such a belief becomes more intense and real. When he came to mourn and weep for Sarah, he would not merely know, but *feel* the truth of an immortality. Our conviction of a future life does not depend upon reasoning. We can reason ourselves just as easily into the opposite conclusion. There is no absurdity in supposing the mind altogether to perish. Why should we not go back again to that original nothing whence we came? It is, after all, not the intellect but the heart that believes. Our affections will not allow us to believe that our loved ones are clean gone for ever. When we mourn for the dead, the immortal part of us sends out its feelers for that part which is severed and gone. That grief which blinds the eyes with tears, does, at the same time, open the eyes of the soul to see beyond into the invisible world. Sorrow pierces the veil, and when all is lost here that other world becomes more real. Again Abraham learned :—

IV. The sacredness of sorrow for the dead. Abraham believed in God; had submitted to His will; had resolved to obey that will, even when it seemed cruel. He was a stern saint, a man of iron determination, who would not shrink from the most difficult duties in the service of his God. Yet this strong man weeps. He feels that it is right to weep—that religion has not destroyed, but rather intensified his humanity. He must pay nature her tribute. The example of those saints whose lives are recorded in the Bible shows us that sorrow for the dead is consistent with perfect submission to the will of God. "Joseph," we are told, "lifted up his voice and wept." We read of the tears of Jacob and of Peter. And even the Lord Jesus, who was free from the sins of our nature, but possessed of its power to feel sorrow, wept over the grave of Lazarus. Piety towards God does not condemn us to lose our humanity. That religion which seeks to eradicate the essential qualities of human nature is not of God. Cloistered virtue, which aims to stifle the domestic affections, has no encouragement from the Bible. True to the facts of human nature, that Book shows us how those who have lived nearest to God have had the largest heart towards mankind. Abraham, the chief example of strong and unstaggering faith, weeps for his dead. The saint had not destroyed the man. The heart, which has the power to believe, has also the power to suffer.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. It is instructive to observe the *time* of her death. She was younger by ten years than Abraham, and yet died thirty-eight years before him. Human life is a subject of very uncertain calculation. God often takes the youngest before the eldest. She lived, however, thirty-seven years after the birth of Isaac, to a good old age, and went home as a shock of corn ripe in its season.—*(Fuller.)*

Few incidents in Sarah's life are recorded. This tells much for the excellence of her character, as it implies the sober and noiseless manner in which she discharged her duties in the retired ways of domestic life. There the virtues of a woman's character shine to the most advantage.

Sarah—1. The pattern-woman (1 Pet. iii. 6). 2. The mother of the Hebrew people. 3. The mother of Isaac, in whom the promised seed was to be called. In the history of redemption she was second in importance only to the mother of our Lord.

Her name was significant of her illustrious and distinguished fame. To Abraham, from the beginning of his pilgrimage, she was Sarai—my princess. So he delighted affectionately to honour her. To the Church at large, the vast multitude of Abraham's believing children, she is Sarah—the princess—to whom, as to a princess, they are all to look, and whom in all generations they are to call blessed (Gen. xvii. 16, 17). Yet the tenour of her life was very private, unostentatious, and unassuming. She tarried at home. The leading features of her character, which the word of inspiration commends, were these: her holy and unadorned simplicity; her meek and quiet spirit—an ornament in the sight of God of great price; and her believing subjection to a believing husband (1 Pet. iii. 1-6). She was devoted to Abraham. Nor was it merely in the blindness of natural and fond affection that she waited on him, but with an intelligent apprehension and appreciation of his high standing, as the friend of God and the heir of the covenant.—(*Candlish.*)

Verse 2. Death is *the* solemn thought of the world. Let it be ever so vulgarized or common, still, beneath the tent of the eastern emir or in the crowded cemeteries of the capital, death is an awful arresting thing. While civilisation has robbed other horrors of their wonder, death is still the insoluble event. But here we have something more than death—we have separation. Abraham and Sarah had lived together for long, but they were parted at last. The shock was broken in Abraham's case by its naturalness. The dissolution of the aged is expected; and often the survivor dies soon.—(*Robertson.*)

Consider the *place* of her death. It was anciently called Kirjath-Arba, afterwards Hebron, situated in the plain of Mamre, where Abraham had lived more than twenty years before he went into the land of the Philistines, and whither he had since returned. Here Sarah died, and here Abraham "mourned" for her. We may take notice of the *forms* of it. He "*came* to mourn," *i.e.*, he came into her tent where she died, and looked at her dead body; his eye affected his heart. There was none of that false delicacy of modern times which shuns to see or attend the burial of near relations. Let him see her, and let him weep—it is the last tribute of affection which he will be able in that manner to pay her. We should also notice the *sincerity* of it; he "wept." Many affect to mourn who do not weep; but Abraham both mourned and wept. Religion does not stop the course of nature, though it moderates it, and by inspiring the hope of a blessed resurrection, prevents our being swallowed up of overmuch sorrow.—(*Fuller.*)

In those tears of Abraham was anguish; but there might have been remorse. Apparently Abraham had nothing to reproach himself with. Quarrels in his married life are recorded, but in all he behaved with tenderness, concession, and dignity. In all things he had supported and cherished his wife, bearing, like a strong man, the burdens of the weak. But oh! let *us* beware. There are bitter recollections which enhance the sorrow of bereavement and change it into agony—recollections which are repeated to us in words which remorse will not cease to echo for ever and ever. "Oh, if they would but come again, I'd never grieve them more." It is this which makes tears scald. To how many a grown heart have not those childish words of the infant hymn gone home, sharp with an undying pang!—(*Robertson.*)

The true mourning a sanctified feeling of death. 1. A fellow-feeling of death, with the dead. 2. An anticipation of death, or a living preparation for one's own death. 3. A believing sense of the end or destination of death, to be made useful to the life.—(*Lange.*)

Is the believer merely suffered, by way of indulgence to sorrow? The assurance that he may sorrow without sinning—that he may indulge his grief without offence—is an unspeakable consolation. The fact that Abraham "came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her"—still more the fact that "Jesus wept"—is as oil poured into the wounds of the heart's lacerated and torn affections. But still more complete is the adaptation of the Gospel to man's nature and man's trials. The Patriarch evidently made conscience of his mourning. His sighs and tears were not merely regarded by him as lawful, for the relief of his overcharged and overburdened soul. Even into this department of his experience he carried his sense of obligation. In a religious and spiritual sense he made a business of his grief. He went about the indulgence of it as a work of faith. He allotted to it a fixed and definite time. He came to Sarah's tent for the express purpose. He gave up for this work his other avocations and employments. His occupation was "to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her." There is, therefore, a time to weep; there is a time to mourn. There is a season during which to mourn and weep is not merely the allowed license or tolerated weakness of the believer, but his proper business, the very exercise to which he is called. This instance of Abraham is not only a warrant and precedent, but a binding and authoritative example. It not merely sanctions a liberty; it imposes an obligation. —(*Candlish.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 3-20.

ABRAHAM BURYING HIS DEAD.

This portion is remarkable in several respects. Here we have the first record of property in land, of purchase, of silver employed as money, and of mourning for the dead, and of burial. Here are the chief heads of human business, and the old, old fashion of mortality brought vividly before us. Abraham makes arrangements for the purchase of a family grave, and buries his wife in peace. It will be instructive to consider the Patriarch so engaged from three points of view:—

I. Consider him as a man. He did, on this occasion, what every right-minded man would feel bound to do. The necessities of human life and destiny cast certain duties upon men. Abraham must "bury his dead out of his sight" (verse 4). He feels the loathsomeness of death. Dishonour has fallen upon the body bereft of life, and it must be hidden in the tomb from the eyes of all living. Abraham had to perform a melancholy duty towards the dead body of his dear wife. He must provide a grave for her, and secure the possession of it so that her body shall rest undisturbed. She must have a funeral worthy of her station in life, and of the love which he bare to her. In all this Abraham was doing a human duty, and he did it affectionately and in a spirit of high-minded self-respect. Considered merely as a *man*, he wins our admiration for those sentiments and feelings of humanity which are so remarkably evident in this narrative.

II. Consider him as a man of business. The transaction with the children of Heth sets forth the character of Abraham regarded as a man of business. 1. *His independence.* Not that scornful spirit of independence which has its root in pride, and despises others; but that high-minded feeling by which a man refuses, without sufficient necessity, to be under an obligation to his fellow man. In this case such an obligation might afterwards have proved inconvenient to Abraham, and have injured the influence of his character. He must deal with these strangers as a man of business ought to deal, honestly and in a healthy spirit of independence. The children of Heth offer the land for a sepulchre as a gift. (Ver. 6.) This is supposed to have been an instance of extraordinary liberality on their part, but the customs of eastern nations forbid such a supposition. Their custom was, and still is, to exchange gifts; but they were gifts which laid the party receiving them under an obligation to give back at least as much again. In the words of Ephron to Abraham, "Nay, my lord, the field give I thee, and the cave that is therein I give it thee" (ver. 11), we have simply a conventional mode of speech—one of those made and provided forms which must be held to mean much less than they express. Abraham asks for a burying-place, and it is offered as a gift. (Verses 4, 6.) He understands what is really meant, refuses the offer, and pays for the ground. Ephron makes a show of reluctance, but at length consents to receive payment. This was all well understood as being a common mode of dealing. Abraham was a just man, and at the same time prudent. It would not be expedient for him to be under an obligation to these people. Besides, he was rich and could well afford to pay, and why should he receive? He might receive such a gift from a dear friend, when no misunderstanding could arise, but not from strangers. It was expedient for him to preserve a manly spirit of independence. In dealing with the world we must be "wise as serpents" as well as "harmless as doves"—innocence must be regulated and guided by wisdom. 2. *His exactness.* Abraham takes great care to have the contract drawn up in due form, for the 17th and 18th verses are like an extract from a legal document. They read like a deed of conveyance. The boundaries of the field are accurately defined, and all the perquisites belonging to it—the trees and the cave. This exactness was the product of a religious feeling. Abraham was desirous to prevent future misunderstandings. When these arise it is well to quell them by a spirit of generosity and conciliation, but it is far better to contrive so that they shall not arise. In order to "live peaceably with all men" it is well that we should take care that, as far as in us lies, there shall be no cause for dispute. Men of business should be exact in all their dealings, for without attention to this the character even of a good man will suffer in the estimation of the world. 3. *His courtesy.* "Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth." (Ver. 3.) He had that refined politeness which enabled him to control his emotions before strangers. When the apparently generous offer was made him, "Abraham stood up and bowed himself to the children of Heth." There is a certain reverence which is due from man to man, and the observance of even the forms of it add a grace and charm to human life. A refined and courteous behaviour acts like oil in diminishing the friction of the social machine. The conventional forms which society has stamped with its approval are often used as mere meaningless phrases, but they are the survival of a time when they possessed solid worth and represented realities. True godliness would put meaning into them. The courtesy of Abraham was the result of a true feeling, not a mere form of salutation and address. The cultivation of such a courtesy would ennoble every transaction of human business.

III. Consider him as a godly man. Abraham acts throughout as one who trusted in God, and whose soul was united to Him for ever. In the light of this incident his conduct cannot be explained on the supposition that he looked only for temporal promises. The eye of his faith saw things "afar off," yet to be realised in a life beyond life. 1. *He believed in immortality.* This is evident by his care that the dead should have decent and honourable burial. Why should there be such concern for the dead body if all is over and ended—if the being that inhabited it is blotted out of existence? This reverence for the dead shows that the mortal frame was once tenanted by spirit, and that that spirit continues to live on, though no longer discerned by men in the flesh. The honour paid to the dead by early nations, especially by the Egyptians, proves that they had a secret glimmer of immortality. Children do not believe that the dead are clean gone for ever, but speak of them as living and acting still. So it was in the childhood of the world. Unsophisticated nature accepts the doctrine of an immortal life. Abraham did not believe that his departed wife had done with God for ever, and therefore he paid honour to the temple where her consecrated soul once dwelt. 2. *He believed that God would grant his posterity to inherit the land.* Abraham knew that God had designed him to be the commencement of a great history, that his children should form a mighty nation in the land of Canaan, and dwell therein for ever. Sarah's burial in that land was a kind of earnest of that inheritance—a sort of consecration of the soil. What a melancholy thought, that it should thus be consecrated by a grave! 3. *He believed in a future state of blessedness for the righteous.* When first called of God he went out on the faith of receiving an inheritance. When he came to Canaan he was told that that country should be his inheritance. Again he was told that while his seed four hundred years afterwards should possess the land, he himself was to have no inheritance in it on this side of the grave—he was to "go to his fathers" (Gen. xv. 15). Still, there was the outstanding promise that *he* was to inherit the land. It would seem as if Abraham was deceived, that he was disappointed of his hope. But God was leading him on to higher things—teaching him to look away from this world. He was learning to see that the promise could only be fully realised in "a better country, that is, a heavenly." True, the earthly land of promise was first made holy by a grave. But this world is to all men more a grave than a home, for in it life's hopes and promises are buried, so that they might come forth purified and know a better resurrection. The earthly Canaan was but a land of graves for successive generations of Abraham's children. There is nothing bright, nothing sure or abiding, but heaven. To that blessed land Abraham looked forward. He laid his wife to rest in hope, and though he himself "received not the promises," he was persuaded that they would be fulfilled in a measure far beyond all earthly hope. He knew that there was only one city which had the everlasting foundations. Faith in God could not be sufficiently satisfied and rewarded by any earthly good. The interest of the righteous in God's inheritance is not for a few short years, but for ever.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 3. *His dead.* So she is called eight several times in this chapter, to note that death makes not any such divorce between godly couples and friends, but that there remains still a blessed conjunction betwixt them, which is founded in the hope of a happy resurrection. Job's children were still his, even after they were dead and buried. How else could it be said, that God gave Job twice as much of everything as he had before" (Job xlii. 10, 13), since he had afterwards but his first number of children, viz., "seven sons and three daughters?" *(Trapp.)*

The expression denotes the moderation of his grief, and the comparative ease with which, from a principle of piety, he was enabled to subdue his emotions and to rise up and engage in the active duties of life. As there is a time for weeping, so there is a time to refrain from weeping, and it is well there is. The necessary cases connected with our condition in this world are a merciful means of raising us from the torpor of melancholy.—*(Bush.)*

Verse 4. He was a "*stranger*," not one belonging to their race; a "*sojourner*," a dweller in the land, not a mere visitor or passing traveller. The former explains why he has no burial place; the latter why he asks to purchase one.

The soil had been made over to Abraham by the Covenant of God, and yet he confesses that he was a stranger and pilgrim in the land. We can have no enduring possession in this world. David, though a wealthy man and a king, made the same confession. (Psa. xxxix. 11.)

It is the acknowledgement that he here makes to the sons of Heth that is referred to in Heb. xi. 13: "They *confessed* that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Abraham, however, did not sustain this character alone. Israel, when put in possession of the land, were taught to view themselves in the same light: "Ye are strangers and sojourners with me." (Lev. xxv. 23.) But Abraham's confession, though true at all times, was peculiarly true and striking when thus uttered at the grave of Sarah. Never does the impression of this truth come upon us with such force; never do we feel the ties that bind us to the earth so loosened, so nearly rent asunder, as when we stand by the grave of those we love. However at other and happier times we may forget the frail tenure by which we hold this earthly tabernacle, we are strongly impressed with the conviction then. We then, indeed, "know the heart of a stranger," and wonder that we have ever felt domesticated here on earth, where there is so much sin and suffering, so little stability and peace. Would that we could carry this abiding conviction along with us into the daily business of life! How little influence would its trials and disappointments possess over us! How much internal peace would it bestow to feel that we were "strangers and pilgrims" on earth, and that soon, amid the comforts of our Father's house, we should smile at the little disquietudes of the way.—(*Bush.*)

All men are *pilgrims* on earth, for they pass on through life driven by an irresistible power. But believers in God are also *strangers*. Their true home is not here. They are not of this world.

To-day it is fair, the next day there may be the thundering storm: to-day I may want for nothing: to-morrow I may be like Jacob, with nothing but a stone for my pillow and the heavens for my curtains. But what a happy thought it is!—though we know not where the road winds, we know where it ends. It is the straightest way to heaven to go round about. Israel's forty years wanderings were, after all, the nearest path to Canaan. We may have to go through trial and affliction: the pilgrimage may be a tiresome one, but it is safe. We cannot trace the river upon which we are sailing, but we know it ends in the floods of bliss at last. We cannot track the roads; but we know that they all meet in the great metropolis of heaven, in the centre of God's universe. God help us to pursue the true pilgrimage of a pious life.—(*Spurgeon*).

A father with his little son is journeying overland to California; and when at night he pitches his tent in some pleasant valley, the child is charmed with the spot, and begs his father to rear a house and remain there; and he begins to make a little fence about the tent, and digs up the wild flowers, and plants them within the enclosure. But the father says, "No, my son! Our home is far distant. Let these things go; for to-morrow we must depart." Now God is taking us, His children, as pilgrims and strangers homeward; but we desire to build here, and must be often overthrown before we can learn to seek "the city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."—(*Beecher*).

"Bury my dead out of my sight" has been a sad necessity for all living, since mortality has made war on life. See the triumphs of death! The faces of our friends, which to look upon was a delight, must now be disfigured in the corruption of the tomb. God changes their countenance and sends them away. The beauty which affection doted upon has disappeared; and those who lately were the desire of our eyes have now become a loathing unto all flesh. She whom Abraham could not bear that others should look upon with unholy desire must now be delivered over to the possession of Death. Let the beautiful, the gay, and the vain think of this, and remember the words, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."

Raised upon the triumphs of death are the triumphs of the resurrection. The "body of our humiliation" shall be charged till it becomes like unto the "glorious body" of Him who has vanquished death.

What disarrays like death? It defaces the fascination of the beautiful. It breaks the lamp of the wise. It withers the strength of the mighty. It snatches the store of the rich. Kings are stripped of trapping, trophy, treasure; "their glory shall not descend after them."—(*R. W. Hamilton.*)

Verses 5, 6. The reply of the children of Heth is deeply respectful to Abraham, and confers on him an unusual favour—admission for his dead into the family sepulchres of the inhabitants: but it does not meet the point at which the request had aimed. They viewed Abraham as enjoying in a special manner the Divine favour, and possibly, as Kalisch suggests, regarded his residing among them as a protection and safeguard against Divine inflictions: compare Abimelech's confession. (Ch. xxi. 22.) They therefore repudiate his description of himself as a stranger and a sojourner, and manifest a wish to incorporate him among themselves. He, therefore, while courteously acknowledging their favourable proposal, now makes known to them his full mind on the matter. His description of himself as a stranger and a sojourner had not been given at random: it had its deep foundation in truth, and was not to be complimented away, but to be adhered to and acted on.—(*Alford.*)

Verse 7. The politeness of Abraham may be seen exemplified among the highest and the lowest of the people of the East; in this respect nature seems to have done for them what art has done for others. With what grace do all classes bow on receiving a favour, or in paying their respects to a superior! Sometimes they bow down to the ground; at other times they put their hands on their bosoms, and gently incline the head; they also put the right hand on the face in a longitudinal position, and sometimes give a long and graceful sweep with the right hand from the forehead to the ground.—(*Roberts.*)

Courtesy smooths the business of human life, and even goes very far towards taking away the grossness from things evil.

Henry IV. of France was standing one day with some of his courtiers at the entrance of a village, and a poor man passing by bowed down to the very ground; and the king, with great condescension, returned his salutation just in the same manner; at which one of his attendants ventured to express his surprise, when the monarch justly replied to him—"Would you have your king exceeded in politeness by one of the lowest of his subjects?"

Courtesy to noble minds is not only to be regarded as a gift, but a means of purchase to buy men out of their own liberty. Violence and compulsion are not half so dangerous; these besiege us openly, give us leave to look to ourselves, to collect our forces, and refortify when we are sensible of our own weakness; but the other undermines us by a fawning stratagem, and, if we be enemies, they make us lay down our weapons, and take up love. (*J. Beaumont.*)

Verses 8, 9. This exactitude in business was of more religious importance than at first sight appears. It was a means of preventing future misunderstandings. Quarrels arise often from false delicacy. It is painful to speak of terms, to introduce into questions especially so delicate as this of bartering and bargaining about money. One party in an agreement knows he means generously, and trusts the other. But each forms a different estimate of rights; one exaggerates, the other depreciates the service done. It is from such undefined boundaries and limitations, from non-distinctness between the mine and the thine, from the use of such phrases as "what you please," that quarrels and dissensions most frequently occur. Therefore Abraham reads a lesson to men of business, and to those whose habits are not those of business. Doubtless there is a Christian way of bearing the consequences of neglect—it is, not to dispute at all; but it is better, if possible, to arrange so that no dispute should arise; and Abraham says as it were to each of us, Let every agreement be distinctly and accurately made, for the sake, not of interest, but peace and charity.—(*Robertson.*)

Civility, courtesy, and generosity adorn religion. The plainness of Christianity is not a rude and insolent one; it stands aloof from flattery, but not from obliging behaviour. Some also are very courteous to strangers, are very much the reverse to those about them; but Abraham's behaviour to his neighbours is no less respectful than it was to the three strangers who called at his tent.—(*Fuller.*)

Machpelah. The term means *double*—a *double cave*, as it is. The name applied to the whole plot or field, including the cave, and sometimes is limited to the cave itself. The mosque now built over the spot is at the base of a rocky slope looking toward the plain of Mamre, and thus in view of Abraham's encampment. The building was originally a Christian church, as its structure shows, and was at a later time converted into a mosque. Within the walls are the sacred shrines or monuments of the patriarchal family, in honour of the dead who are buried beneath. A chapel is built around each of these tombs, and is entered through a gateway of the railing, as in modern cathedrals. There are six shrines: those of Abraham and Sarah, the first pair, are in the inner portico, —the former in a recess to the right, the latter to the left, both closed by silver gates. "The chamber is cased in marble. The so-called tomb is a sarcophagus about six feet in height, built up of plastered stone or marble, and hung with three carpets of green and gold. Further on, and within the walls of the mosque, are the shrines of Isaac and Rebekah, with less style, while those of Jacob and Leah are in a separate cloister opposite the entrance of the mosque. All these are what the Biblical narrative would lead us to expect, and there is the evidence that the Mohammedans have carefully guarded these sacred spots, and they stand as the confirmation of our Christian faith. The mosque is called the Great Haram." (See Stanley's "History of the Jewish Church."—*(Jacobus.)*

Verses 10–12. Bargains and covenants used anciently to be entered into and solemnly ratified in the gates of the cities, from the ease of procuring witnesses among the crowds that resorted thither, written documents being then but little in vogue. It was especially of importance to Abraham that the purchase should be known and ratified. Had he accepted the sepulchre as a present, or bought it in a private way, his title to it might at some subsequent period have been disputed, and his descendants been deprived of that which he was anxious of securing to them. But all fears of this kind were prevented by the publicity of the transaction. The chief persons of the city were not only witnesses of it, but agents, by whose mediation Ephron was induced to conclude the bargain. Being witnessed, moreover, by all who went in or out of the gate of the city, there was little likelihood, after possession was once taken, that any doubt would ever arise respecting the transfer of the property, or the title of Abraham's posterity to possess it.—*(Bush.)*

Ephron proposes to give the land. This, however, was only after the Oriental fashion of declining a price, the rather to put one under greater obligation and expecting a full equivalent, either in money or in service. We have often found among the people a refusal to name a fixed price, especially for any service done, expecting more by putting it upon your honour. Besides, it is in true Oriental style to pretend to the greatest liberality, which you find to be only an exaggerated manner of speech. Ephron expressed himself as willing to be bound by this free offer, "*in the presence of these witnesses.*" Abraham being known as rich and powerful, there was the greater motive with Ephron to waive a fixed price.—*(Jacobus.)*

It is well not to lie under any unnecessary obligations to the children of this world. By a wise caution in this regard, the righteous man preserves the full influence of his character.

Verses 13–16. *If thou wilt hear me.* The language is abrupt, being spoken in the heat of excitement. *I give silver.* "I have given," in the original, that is, I have determined to pay the full price. If the Eastern giver was liberal, the receiver was penetrated with an equal sense of the obligation conferred, and a like determination to make an equivalent return.—(*Murphy.*)

The traffic and purchase of Abraham, throughout, a testimony of Israelitish prudence and foresight, but free from all Jewish meanness and covetousness. —*(Lange.)*

The gradual development of money, from the weighing of the nobler metals to stamped coins, has had an important influence upon the history of mankind.

Observe, also, how courteous phrases contain a higher excellence than they mean. "What is that betwixt me and thee?" The children of Heth had no intention whatever of being taken at their word, any more than a man has now when he calls himself your humble servant, or bids you command him. We must go back to an earlier age when phrases were coined and meant something—when gifts were gifts and nothing was hoped for in return, in order to catch the life that was once in our conventional phraseology. So now language preserves, as marble preserves shells of hoar antiquity, the petrified phrases of a charity and humbleness which once were living. They are dead, but they do at least this—they keep up memorials of what should be; so that the world, in its daily language of politeness, has a record of its duty. Take those phrases, redeem them from death, live the life that was once in them. Let every man be as humble, as faithful, as obedient as his language professes, and the kingdom of God has come!—*(Robertson.)*

Verse 17. Abraham had confidence that God would make sure the land to his posterity after him, yet he uses his own prudence and foresight. The promises of God do not preclude the use of human means.

The first real estate property of the patriarchs was a grave. This is the only good which they buy from the world—the only enduring thing they find here below. In that sepulchre Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, were laid; there Jacob laid Leah, and there Jacob himself would rest after his death, even in death itself a confessor of his faith in the promise. This place of the dead becomes the *punctum saliens* of the possession of the promised land. It was designedly thus minutely described, as the glorious acquisition of the ancestors of Israel. It was indeed the bond which ever bound the descendants of Abraham in Egypt to the land of promise, drew with a magnetic force their desires thither, and, collected in Canaan, they should know where the ashes of their fathers rested, and that they are called to inherit the promise for which their fathers were here laid in the grave.—*(Delitzsch.)*

The cave of Machpelah became for the Israelites the sacred grave of the old covenant, which they won again with the conquest of Canaan, just as the Christians in the Crusades reconquered the sacred grave of the new covenant, and with it Palestine. And the Christians also, like the Jews, have lost again their sacred grave and their holy land, because they have not inwardly adhered sufficiently to the faith of their fathers, who beyond the sacred grave looked for the eternal city of God, because they have sought too much "the living among the dead." Even now the last desire of the orthodox Jews is for a grave at Jerusalem, in Canaan.—*(Lange.)*

Verses 17, 18. Throughout the above transaction there was much more in the mind of Abraham than was known to the people with whom he was dealing. The immediate and ostensible reason for making the purchase was to procure a place of interment for his wife; but he had others no less important. One of these was to express his confidence in the Divine promise. God had promised to him and to his seed the land wherein he sojourned; but Abraham had continued there till this time without gaining in it so much as one foot of land. Yet it was not possible that the promise could fail. He was as much assured that it should be fulfilled as if he had seen its actual accomplishment. Under this conviction, he purchased the field as a pledge and earnest of his future inheritance. A similar compact, made with precisely the same view, occurs in the prophecies of Jeremiah (Ch. xxxiii. 6-16, 42-44). Having their burying-place in Canaan, there their bones were to be laid with the bones of their father Abraham, and this was the most likely means of keeping alive in every succeeding generation the hope of ultimately possessing the whole land. (*Bush.*)

Verses 19, 20. The confirmation of his title is here repeated. It was a most important step, and a great fact in the history. Abraham, as father of the faithful—he to whom the Holy Land had been promised in covenant—had declared his faith in the promise, and buried his dead on the soil, to commend his faith to his descendants *Were made sure.* Here rendered in the Greek *was confirmed.* "It stood" is also expressive, as we say *it stood in his name*, or the transaction *stood.* The mosque, Al Haram, as he saw it, has one minaret on each of two oblique corners of the walled inclosure. The walls, as seen from the filthy narrow streets, are high, solid and ancient in appearance, having the old bevelled bordering. As seen from the hill, the building proper occupies only a third or fourth part of the enclosure, and stands at one corner. On one side of the outer walls are eight pilasters and two buttresses. The masonry bears all the marks of the most ancient Jewish architecture, and *Robinson* is confident that it was erected before the downfall of the nation. Josephus' account agrees with this view. For a diagram of this noble monument of sacred antiquity, see *Stanley's Lectures on the Jewish Church.—(Jacobus.*[1]

CHAPTER XXIV.

Critical Notes.—1. And Abraham was old.] He was now in his hundred and fortieth year. (See ch. xxv. 20.) **2. Eldest servant of his house.]** Heb. "His servant, the elder of his house." This term denotes office, not length of servitude. This confidential head servant or steward may have been Eliezer of Damascus, who was Abraham's steward sixty years before this. (Ch. xv. 2.) *Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh.* "In these words is euphemistically described a practice of making an oath binding by touching that part of the body which symbolises power and continuance. For the Jew a farther sanctity was imparted to this confirmation of an oath by that member being the recipient of God's covenant of circumcision. The practice is found besides in ch. xlvii. 29, only." *(Alford.)* "The thigh is the symbol of posterity; in Israel the symbol of the promised posterity, with the included idea of the promise. (Gen. xlvi. 26; Ex. i. 5.) Elieazer and Joseph thus must swear by the posterity; the promise and the hope of Abraham and Israel." *(Lange.)* **3. By the Lord.]** *By Jehovah.* The redemptive name of God, as most appropriate, in dealing with those who are in fellowship with Him. "It is not an ordinary marriage which is here about to be made, which would fall under the providence of Elohim, but a marriage which concerns the kingdom of God, and therefore Jehovah appears in the whole narrative." *(Keil.)* **4. Unto my country, and to my kindred.]** His country was Mesopotamia, where Abraham had dwelt for a time after leaving Ur of the Chaldees. His kindred were Shemites, who, though they preserved the knowledge of God, yet—as we learn from the instance of Laban, (ch. xxxi),—retained some vestiges of idolatry. **7. The Lord God of heaven.]** *Heb. Jehovah, the God of the heavens.* **9. Abraham his master.]** *Heb. His lord.* **Sware to him.]** *Heb.* Was *sworn to him.* The passive voice is used in Heb. to convey the idea that one is adjured by another. **10. Mesopotamia.]** The *Heb.* term is *Aram* (or Syria) *of the two rivers*—the name for the district lying between the Euphrates and the Tigris. The *Gr.* name, *Mesopotamia*, has the same meaning, *midst of the rivers.* **City of Nahor.]** Haran, (Charran), see ch. xi. 31. **11. At the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water.]** The women in the East still draw water from the wells at evening, and use the occasion for holding conversations and exchanging news, as the men were accustomed to do at the gate. This duty devolves upon the females without distinction of rank. **12. Send me good speed this day.]** *Heb.* "Bring it to pass, or cause it to happen," *i.e.*, the object of the journey. The same word is used in ch. xxvii. 20: "Because the Lord thy God *brought it to me*," *i.e.*, made it to happen. **13. The well of water.]** Or fountain of water. The two words are often used interchangeably. The Heb. word for well or fountain is *ayin*, the primary signification of which is "eye." The eye is the source from which the tears flow, and therefore the same term is applied to an opening in the earth from which waters gush forth. **15. Upon her shoulder.]** This was the most graceful mode of carrying a pitcher when it was empty. **19. Until they have done drinking.]** Kalisch remarks, "If it is remembered that camels, though endowed in an almost marvellous degree with the power of enduring thirst, drink when an opportunity offers an enormous quantity of water, it will be acknowledged that the trouble to which the maiden cheerfully submitted required more than ordinary patience." **21. Held his peace, to wit, whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not?]** *Heb.* "Keeping silence to know whether Jehovah had prospered his way or not." **22. Golden ear-ring.]** Properly a nose ring. It was a single one, not a pair. Such are worn by Eastern women, the left nostril being pierced for the purpose. (Ver. 47.) "The presents were not as yet bridal presents: those first come in ver. 53, and could not be given till the consent of Laban and Bethuel had been ascertained." *(Alford.)* **32. And he ungirded his camels, and gave straw and provender for the camels]** "It is plain that Laban is to be understood as having unsaddled and unloaded the camels, besides furnishing the provender, water, etc. Everything was supplied for their comfort in true Oriental hospitality." *(Jacobus.)* **49. That I may turn to the right hand, or to the left.]** That is, should they decline his application, he would seek a wife for Isaac among other families of that people. **50. The thing proceedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto the bad or good.]** *Heb.* "The word cometh forth from Jehovah; we are not able to speak unto thee bad or good." That is, we cannot say anything at all against the measure. (Gen. xxxi. 24.) 59. **Her nurse.]** The name of this nurse was Deborah. (Gen. xxxv. 8.) **63. To meditate.]** Onkelos has *to pray*, and the LXX. *to exercise himself*, *i.e.*, religiously, to employ his mind and heart in devout contemplation. The Heb. word occurs only in this place, and is variously interpreted. The rendering in the A.V. is generally adopted. **64. She lighted off the camel.]** "It is an Eastern custom, prevalent in many parts to this day, that women, when riding on the road and meeting strange men, descend from their animals as a mark of respect offered to the stronger sex." *(Kalisch.)* **67. And Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.** The interval between her death and his marriage was about three years.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1—9.

ABRAHAM'S PROVISION FOR THE MARRIAGE OF HIS SON.

The death of Sarah had left a sad breach in Abraham's family. He had now been mourning for her three years. But in the sorrows of bereavement he must still think of the duty which lies before him, and how he may fulfil the purpose of God so clearly made known to him. He knew that Isaac was the son of promise, in whom his house was to be enlarged and to take its destined place among the family of nations. He naturally, therefore, seeks a wife for his son, exercising due care and circumspection in so important a matter. In the provision which he now makes for his son's marriage, we note two elements.

I. **Human Prudence.** Abraham is apparently left to act for himself in this matter, to use the wisdom which the experience of ordinary life had taught him. He appears to have no distinct revelation from God on the subject. He does not act as a fanatic who vaguely trusts in some divine power and neglects the use of suitable means. Not such were the saints whose lives are recorded in the Bible. They were all men of faith and devotion, but they were rational and human in all features of their character. Abraham sets about this work as a prudent man would do. 1. *He accepts the fact that his time for making such a provision is short* (Verse 1). He was now an old man and nigh unto the close of his mortal day. His time for all human effort and labour would soon be at an end. A solemn duty was imposed upon him, and he must discharge it in the narrow space which now lay between him and the grave. It is wise thus to look the sad facts of life in the face, for in human affairs death closes all opportunity. 2. *He is careful about the family from whence his son's wife is to spring* (Verse 3). He had seen enough of the wickedness of the Canaanites among whom he dwelt to convince him that no great nation could arise from any alliance with them. Their wickedness grew increasingly from generation to generation until they had now reached a rank maturity of corruption. The law of inherited tendencies is a sad fact of human nature, and tends in an enormous degree to spread and intensify the power of evil in the world of mankind. Abraham must look for a goodly seed, for a purer channel through which the life of his sacred nation is to flow. 3. *He relies upon human faithfulness.* The "eldest servant of his house that ruled over all he had" (Verse 2) was, probably, Eliezer of Damascus who for fifty-four years had been Abraham's faithful steward. He had been the confidential head servant to whom was entrusted the most sacred and important affairs of the family. There are occasions in life in which man must repose great trust in his fellow man. The time comes when we have to arrange for a future which will unfold itself when we are hidden in the grave and can no longer take our part in the things of this life. Our power to do good and to act well our part in the world would be greatly crippled if we could not rely upon human faithfulness. In all these things Abraham acted upon the highest principles of human prudence.

II. Religious Faith. But with Abraham it was more than mere human prudence. It was the strength of his character that he believed in God. He is acting in a history which throughout all its course is overshadowed by a greater and a higher world than this. 1. *He gratefully recognises the hand of God in all his past life* (Verse 1.) He does not ascribe his success to his own skill and prudence, but to the favour of God. God had blessed him in all things. He had first trusted the bare word of God, and then faith was a supreme effort. But now through many years of blessings from above his faith had received due encouragement and support. Memory would now serve to stimulate faith and hope. God had blessed him in the past, and therefore he would trust Him for the future. 2. *He recognises the supreme control of God over all things.* He says, "the Lord God of heaven took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred." He knew with a distinct and certain knowledge that it was God who shaped his life and guided him through the wanderings of many years. Ever since he was first called he had felt the leading of a Divine hand. Living faith looks not to forces inherent in matter, but trusts in the living God who controls all times, agents, and events. 3. *He acts upon the known will of God.* It was enough for him that God had spoken, promised His blessing, and the land for an eternal possession. He had faith in God's holy covenant. In seeking a suitable wife for Isaac, he is but working from one great truth revealed to him. He knew that God who had promised to make him a great nation would accomplish his promise and prosper every work of his hands, and guide it to the best results. He used all proper human means, but he acted in faith that, in this matter, the choice would still be God's. 4. *While he trusts in human faithfulness, he recognises the importance of binding men by a sense of religious fear and duty.* He binds his servant by an oath (Verses 3, 9.) Human morality must rest upon a religious basis, which alone can render it constant and safe. Independent morality is too apt to be influenced by the temper of the age or passing expediency, so that we cannot trust it at all times as an unchanging standard. To morality, therefore, we must add Godliness if we would give any real and lasting strength to human obligations.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Old age, with its growing infirmities and sure decay, is sad to look upon; but the blessing of God imparts a beauty to it, for He will never leave nor forsake those whom He has blessed. Their hoary head is a crown of glory, for the light of heaven has touched it.

Abraham had a good grey head, as it is elsewhere said of him; hence so honoured, not only at home, but of the Hittites (ch. xxiii.). God bids us to "honour the face of the old man" (Lev. xix. 32); for the hoary head is a crown, so that it be found in the way of righteousness. God is called "The Ancient of days;" and, because "holy," therefore "reverend is His name," as saith the Psalmist (Ps. cxi. 9).—*(Trapp.)*

Abraham's life, since he received the Divine call, was not exempt from many troubles and sorrows; yet the blessing of God fell even upon these "in all things."

The Gospel promises that blessing which Abraham enjoyed. To faithful believers in every age, "all things" still work together for good.

Verse 2. The person whom Abraham entrusted with this delicate task has a threefold designation. First, he is *his servant* or minister. Secondly, he is the old man, ancient, or elder of his house. Here the term elder approaches its official signification. In early times age was taken into account, along with good conduct and aptitude, as the qualification for services of trust. Thirdly, he *ruled over all that he had*. He was therefore a master as well as a minister.—*(Murphy.)*

To put the hand under one's thigh was probably a form of making oath, or giving most solemn pledge to another. We do not read of it elsewhere, except only where Jacob requires the same of Joseph (Gen. xlvii. 29). The thigh is the part on which the sword rests, and thus it expresses dominion. "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh." It is also the seat of generation, and so it might refer to the covenant of circumcision. The servant sacredly swore subjection and obedience to his master, by this formal act, with reference to the Divine covenant.—*(Jacobus.)*

Verse 3. Abraham's appeal to Jehovah. 1. His name. Jehovah is the personal name of God, and therefore a proper one to be employed by those who were in fellowship with Him. It is His redemptive name, most fitly employed with designed reference to the Covenant of Grace made with Abraham. 2. His dominion. He is the author of all being, and therefore rules and possesses heaven and earth. He is, therefore, the sole arbiter of the oathtaker's destiny, not only in this life but also in that which is to come. 3. His concern for the purity of His servants. Abraham well knew that God loved righteousness in those who professed to serve Him: therefore he took the needful steps to secure the purity of his family.

In these prudential arrangements for the prosperity and honour of his family, we see Abraham's true character as a *spiritual man* just as much as we see it in his most heroic acts of faith. 1. His determined aversion to idolatry. He will make his servant swear by Jehovah alone. His neighbours were idolators. He was on friendly terms with them and would go far to please them but in this solemn matter he must declare for the true God. The great purpose of that early revelation of which he formed so important a part, was to teach the doctrine of the Divine unity. The voice to the chosen people, rising above all others, ever spake thus, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." The land was given to Abraham in order that idolatry might be overthrown. 2. His godliness. In seeking a wife for his son he is not guided by motives of worldly policy. He makes no mention of riches, honours, or personal attractions. He is only concerned that his son shall form an alliance worthy of his high calling of God. He had learned to look at every circumstance of human life in its God-ward relations. 3. His distrust of human nature without the safeguards of religion. He well knew that it was more likely that his son—though he had received such a pious training—should be corrupted by an idolatrous wife, than that such a wife should be won over to the true faith by her believing husband. And even should Isaac maintain his integrity, there would still be some hazard for his family. Deriving its origin partly from heathen nations, and with idolatrous practices everywhere prevailing, such a family must degenerate. Abraham knew the frailty of human nature too well not to surround the pure faith of his seed with the strongest possible safeguards.

How admirable a pattern is this for parents in reference to the forming of matrimonial connections for their children. Unhappily, great numbers even among the professors of godliness bring nothing but worldly considerations to this all-important subject. The outward advantages of fortune, rank, or personal attractions are the only things regarded. But what comparison can these bear to the internal qualities of sound principle, good sense, amiable temper, and meek devoted piety? What permanent happiness can we promise ourselves in connection with one who cannot understand our views, or enter into our feelings; to whom we cannot speak of religion so as to be sympathised with, advised, or comforted; with whom we cannot take sweet counsel on the things of all others most interesting and absorbing to our souls? No wonder that in such unions comfort and serenity of spirit are banished from our abodes. No wonder that there arise estrangements of affection, diversity of pursuits, contrariety of will, domestic jangling, mutual accusations and retorts, and all that embitters or poisons the springs of love and peace. Whether, therefore, we are choosing for ourselves in this matter, or sanctioning the device of others, let the example of this holy man have its due weight in governing our conduct. Let us learn from him to subordinate everything to the one great concern—the interests of the soul. Let every plan and purpose entertained, every connection formed, express our firm and unvarying conviction of the reality, the importance, the preciousness of those interests which infinitely transcend all others.—*(Bush.)*

Abraham does not forget his relation to the kingdom of God. This marriage is not a private and individual matter, but one affecting countless millions who are to be blessed in his seed. Isaac has to sustain a peculiar and a sacred character. He has to inherit and transmit, not simply a family name, importance, or worldly possessions merely, but the hope and promise of salvation. His marriage is significant as pointing to the purity of the kingdom of God, and also to the importance of woman in that kingdom.

Verse 4. The conditions might seem to be irreconcilable. On the one hand, Isaac must contract no alliance with the daughters of the land; and, on the other hand, he must not leave the land to seek a bride elsewhere. The former is essential to the preservation of the holy seed, pure and uncontaminated from all intermixture with strange and idolatrous nations. The latter is indispensable to his succeeding his faithful father, not only in his ultimate inheritance of the promised country, but also in his preliminary pilgrimage meanwhile, as a stranger and sojourner in the land. For Isaac is to share his father's trial as well as his reward. He is to walk by faith in an inheritance to come—living and dying in the land destined to be his: but without a portion of it that he can call his own, except his grave. Hence he must continue among the people, from whom he is not at liberty to select a wife; nor may he go in search of one to the ancient seat of his race.—*(Candlish.)*

The kindred of Abraham were Shemites, Hebrews, and still retained some knowledge of the true God, and some reverence for Him and His will. —*(Murphy.)*

It would have been natural prudence in Abraham to have sought a wife for his son among the Canaanites. This would have tended to secure protection and good will for Isaac, and would have greatly contributed towards the possession of the land by his family. The fact that Abraham acted contrary to what worldly prudence would suggest shows that he was under the guidance of God.

In the Old Testament we see marriage as a natural institution; in the New it is brought before us in a religious light, for we are shown its spiritual significance, it is there likened to Christ and the Church. Now, what is remarkable here is, that the union of Christ and the Church is not illustrated by marriage, but marriage by this spiritual union, that is, the natural is based upon the spiritual. And this is what is wanted; it gives marriage a religious signification, and it thus becomes a kind of semi-sacrament. Now there are two points in which this illustration holds good: first, in the nature of the union, for in marriage, as in the union between Christ and His Church, like is joined to unlike. The other point of resemblance is in the principle of sacrifice, for as no love between man and wife can be true which does not issue in a sacrifice of each for the other, so Christ gave Himself for His Church and the Church sacrifices itself to His service. The only true love is self devotion. Thus we see how all, even the every day affairs of married life, must fail without this principle of the cross of Christ.—(*Robertson.*)

Verse 5, 6. The servant, when the commission is first proposed to him, sees the difficulty. He is not to marry his master's son to any daughter of the Canaanites; neither will he be allowed to take Isaac back to the land from whence Abraham came. And yet he may be unable to persuade any woman of the country and kindred to which Abraham limits him—any daughter of Terah's family—to leave her home—to commit herself to the care of a stranger, and to share the fate of an unknown husband. In these circumstances, he will not bind himself by an absolute and unconditional oath. Nor is it until he is not only encouraged by Abraham's strong expression of his faith in the guidance of Jehovah—but relieved also by the arrangement, that, in the contingency he apprehended, he is to be free from his vow—that he consents to undertake, under so solemn a sanction, so responsible a mission. His scruple is reasonable and honourable. It is of such a nature as may well increase his master's confidence in him. It marks his conscientious sense of obligation, and his sacred reverence for an oath.—(*Candlish.*)

He swears cautiously, he doth not rashly rush upon his oath; he swears not in jest, but in judgment. So must we (Jer. iv. 2), duly considering the conditions and circumstances; as the nature of an oath, the matter whereabout, the person by whom, and before whom, the time, the place, our calling and warrant thereunto. "Be not rash" (Eccl. v. 2.) Swear not in heat and choler, as David did when he was going against Nabal; but soon after blessed Abigail for better counsel.—(*Trapp.*)

In our dealings with even the best of men we must sacredly preserve the sense of our own individual responsibility.

Verse 7. Abraham's expectation of success. 1. Founded upon what God is. The God of heaven and earth, and therefore controlling all things and events, and thus accomplishing His will. The thing hoped for was not impossible with God, and it was well in accordance with His known will. 2. Founded upon what God had been to him. God had called him from his father's house, and from the land of his kindred. He had been blessed in all things. He had been guided in every step of his way, hitherto; surely he might trust for the next step. Every past favour is a pledge of a future one. "Thou hast"—"Thou wilt," is a Scripture demonstration. 3. Founded upon the Word of God to him. It may be that Abraham had no distinct word of revelation to direct him in the choice of a wife for Isaac. But God had promised him the land, and assured the greatness and perpetuity of his family. He, therefore, reasons from the truths already made known, justly infering that his pious wish would be realised, and that the angel of God would guide his servant on this solemn embassy. One thing was clear—that which he desired was right in itself. With the full confidence of faith he leaves the question of means to the disposal of that Providence which had guided his life hitherto—to that Infinite Wisdom which had spoken to him words of large promise. Thus the Word of God is not to be regarded as merely a definite portion of truth, but as a seed ever growing into more abundant life.

We should so enter upon every work as to be able to promise to ourselves the presence and blessing of God.

The term "angel" in Scriptural usage is employed not only to denote those personal agents whom the Most High may see fit to make the executors of His will, but also in an impersonal sense, implying in many cases merely a dispensation of Providence, whether in a way of mercy or of judgment.

The phraseology, indeed, but rarely occurs in respect of the ordinary incidents of life; but extraordinary operations of Providence, or events fought with momentous consequences, though accomplished by natural means, are in Scripture spoken of as "angels." Thus the destruction of the first-born in Egypt is attributed to an angel, because such an event was extraordinary and memorable in the highest degree. In like manner the destruction of Sennacherib's army is ascribed to angelic agency. We suppose the angel to be the personification of a special Providence. God would send His angel before the servant in the sense of preparing his way, of removing difficulties and objections, and fully reconciling the minds of his kindred to the step.—*(Bush.)*

Verse 8. Abraham here releases the steward from the oath, in case the supposed difficulty should occur; for in no case would he consent to have his son taken to that land, to dwell outside of the land of promise. "This oath implies that if Abraham should die this steward would have an influential position towards Isaac."—*(Kurtz—Jacobus.)*

This second time he lays charge on his servant not to do it. Better no wife than displease God, than violate conscience. He purchaseth his pleasure at too dear a rate that pays his honesty to get it. He hath less of the ballast and more of the sail, makes more haste than good speed, that thus speeds himself.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 9. The servant was enjoined by oath to undertake his master's commands. This was allowable in Judaism; but Christ says, "Swear not at all." Our nay is to be nay, and nothing else but nay, and our yea, yea; the word of the Christian is to be so true that no oath could add to its security. But what Abraham meant to express was this, that he would hold the man firm to his word by religious fear and duty. There are two ways of speaking truth: many a man may be true from expediency, and this may last so long as he sees he shall gain by being true; but as soon as an opportunity appears for winning something by falsehood without any immediate evil consequences, then his truth is at an end. Truth, to be constant, must lean upon a religious basis.—(*Robertson.*)

This servant obeyed the voice of a man to whom he believed God had spoken. Such is our position in regard to the sacred writers. We believe through their word.

The call and exaltation of Rebekah, her position in the kingdom of God, all depended upon the oath between Abraham and his servant. She was ignorant all the while of the great things which were preparing for her. So God works for His children far away out of their sight,—preventing them by the blessings of His goodness.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 10—14.

THE EMBASSY OF ABRAHAM'S SERVANT.

I. He uses all possible human means of success. He took ten camels with him for the purpose of carrying sufficient provisions for the journey and presents for the bride. He felt bound to put in an appearance worthy of the rank of his master. A sufficient number of camels would be necessary for bringing home the bride and her suite. The means to be used must in themselves have a natural fitness for gaining the desired end. Even under the guidance of the highest religious faith, and the most comfortable assurance of God's favour, we must rightly use our human reason and sense of the fitness of things. There are certain facts of social life which we must acknowledge, and act accordingly. It is presumption to trust that to Providence which we can determine and arrange ourselves.

True faith is a living and energetic thing, and diligent in the use of means. Faith and duty are one in essence, and they cannot be really separated.

II. He expects Divine Help. He did not entirely trust to human means, but looked to God for help and success. Human prudence, of itself, would have suggested a most natural course to him. When he had reached the end of his journey he could have enquired after his master's kinsmen, concerning whom tidings had been received before he left home. He could have made his way to the dwellings of Nahor's children, and introduce himself as the representative of Nahor's brother. He could then, with some propriety, demand the daughter as a wife for Abraham's son. He had a strong case—sufficient ground for making such a demand. According to the ordinary ways of the world, this design was proper and likely to succeed. This would be held to be a princely style of matrimonial negociation. But we are here studying a history which is overshadowed by the spiritual world—a history, not of nations as such, but rather a history of the kingdom of God. The choice appeared to be left to the servant, but in reality it was God's choice. This man evidently expected Divine help. Consider, 1. *His prayer to God for success* (Verse 12.) In a large portion of a lifetime spent with his master he had seen evident signs of a Divine Providence ordering the steps of a good man in a most remarkable manner. He had learned that it was true wisdom to rely upon the God of his master Abraham. His mode of conducting this treaty is truly primitive, but at the same time pervaded by a spirit of genuine piety. Now that he is near the end of his proposed journey, and confident that he had done everything in his power for its success, he pauses to know the will of God and to invoke his aid. Before entering upon so great a work he must needs collect his thoughts for prayer. This incident throws light upon his character as a religious man. He knew that whatever the wisdom of man might design, success must come from God. 2. *Prayer for special Divine guidance.* He appeared to lay down the method in which Providence should bring about the desired end (Verses 13, 14.) He prayed that the woman, of whom he was to make choice, might appear at the well. We are not to imitate him in every exact particular of this conduct, for Christ condemned the use of signs. The time, place, and manner, should be left to the will of God. To depend upon signs seems like an appeal to chance. But this man did it in faith. His suggestion was not unreasonable in itself. It was most natural and likely that what he expected should come to pass. When he presented himself at the well where the women of the neighbourhood were wont to assemble he would have an opportunity of observing the behaviour of the damsels, and of forming a judgment upon their kindness and goodwill. Therefore he prays that God would bless the design which he had thus formed in his own mind. The principle is sound that when we have formed our plans with due care we may ask God to bless and encourage us. The providence of God often fits in to the providence of man. But we should be very careful in seeking signs. (1) Our plan should be formed upon the lines of duty. (2) Should be prompted by a spirit of faith and love. We should be ready to leave all to the choice of a kind and loving Father. (3) Should not take the form of a challenge, as if we should cease to trust in God were He to act in a different way from what we expected. However confident we may be in our own wisdom and integrity, we should be still meek and trustful, not as claiming from God, but rather as seeking for His pure favour. This servant forms his plan in the spirit of piety, and, as it were, spreads it out before the Lord. There are also occasions in the life of a believer when faith, as by a kind of Divine instinct, possesses the gift of prophecy. 3. *Prayer for what was good in itself.* (1) He looks for the best qualities in the bride. She was to be amiable, modest, kind—all qualities of the heart, and without which all other endowments were vain. (2) He desires the Divine confirmation of his choice,—"She that Thou hast appointed." (Ver. 14.) The approbation of God was the chief thing. He went as far as he could in making the choice, leaving all the rest to God. We are not guilty of presumption when we pray for what is good in itself, and are ready to leave the whole matter ultimately to the will of God.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 10. This delicate mission was delegated to a servant or slave, because Isaac, according to the notions of those days, was too inexperienced to go himself. A touching confidence subsisted between master and servant. And in this we learn in what true liberty consists: this man was a servant,—a slave if you will,—and yet he enjoyed far greater liberty than our modern servants, who are free to go where they please; his freedom consisted in that glorious principle of obedience through love, which makes a man free at once, and which we have so grievously forgotten.—(*Robertson.*)

He did not trouble his aged master in things of inferior moment, but having all his affairs entrusted to him, adjusts those matters himself. Taking with him ten camels, and of course a number of attendants, partly for accommodation, and partly, we may suppose, to give a just idea of his master's substance, he set off for Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor.—(*Fuller.*)

When we are thoughtful, energetic, and faithful in doing our own part, then we have the best reason for trusting in Providence.

The large treasure thus borne to the land of the bride, this splendid outfit, considered together with the evident piety of the servant, would all produce the impression that Abraham was greatly blessed by God.

Had the servant gone alone, without any evidences of his master's wealth, it is clear that he could not reasonably have expected to obtain the same credence for his assertions on the subject. The measure, therefore, was in every view politic and wise, although we cannot question that both Abraham and his servant, as habitually pious men, placed more dependence on a secret Divine interposition than upon any devices, however well chosen, of their own.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 11. The camels were made to kneel down for repose. "A good man is merciful to his beast." (Prov. xii. 10.)

The evening was the cool part of the day. The simple maidens of primitive days attended personally to domestic affairs. The experienced steward might therefore naturally expect to see the high-born damsels of the land at the public well, which had probably given rise to the neighbouring town.—(*Murphy.*)

The women contrive to draw an enjoyment even out of this irksome duty, as it affords the best opportunity they have of meeting and talking together, and of displaying their finery to each other. They by no means appear to the worst advantage as to dress at the wells; and this circumstance shows that Abraham's servant might, there, without any incongruity, invest Rebekah with the ornaments he had brought. To a traveller in the East; the best opportunities of making his observations on the females will occur in the evening at the wells. Eliezar was aware of this, and regarded the opportunity as favourable for his purpose.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 12. Prayer—needful at all times, and in the smallest things of life—was specially needed in this instance. 1. The object of this embassy was of extraordinary importance. A wife had to be found for the heir of promise—a mother for the kingdom of God. 2. This was a special concern of God. The Covenant God was about to found a great nation to preserve the knowledge of Himself in the world, and to be the means of salvation. Messiah was to come of these, according to the flesh. God's own glory was specially concerned in this marriage.

"Lord, God of my master, Abraham." The piety of the servant speaks well for the godly example set by the master.

The goodness and faithfulness of God to other saints of His should encourage us. In living the life of faith we are not solitary, but belong to a numerous company in all ages who trusted in God. They form a "great cloud"—those witnesses of His grace.

The prayer is remarkable for—1. *The faith in which it is offered.* He speaks all along under a full persuasion that the providence of God extended to the minutest events, and that there was no presumption in appealing to Him on the present occasion. His words are full of confidence that God would direct him in a matter of so much importance to His Church in all future ages. 2. *The correct views of the character of Jehovah which he expresses.* He addresses Him as the Covenant God of Abraham, who had given him exceeding great and precious promises. In approaching Him in this character, he would occupy the best possible ground for urging his request, as any promise made to Abraham would furnish a plea which could scarcely fail to be effectual.—*(Bush.)*

By approaching Him as a God in covenant, he would find matter for faith to lay hold upon; every promise to Abraham would thus furnish a plea, and turn to a good account. Surely this may direct us in our approaches to a throne of grace, to make mention of a greater than Abraham, with whom also God is in covenant, and for whose sake the greatest of all blessings may be expected. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is to us what the God of Abraham was to Eliezer; and in the name of our Redeemer we may pray and hope for everything that is great and good.—*(Fuller.)*

Verses 13, 14. This entreaty for a sign is not presumption, for—1. The expedient he uses was rational. The circumstances he looked for were likely in themselves. 2. He leaves all issues to God, and looks to Him alone for success. 3. He does not stand upon conditions of his own with God. He does not suspend his own conduct upon the granting of what he desires. He rather humbly seeks the countenance and co-operation of God.

When we have done our best in rightly using our discretion and human wisdom, we may with all the more confidence look to God for direction and success.

He now proposes a sign by which he shall receive the Divine intimation of the person intended for Isaac's bride. He will use the means. He will do his best as to a choice, but he will submit the decision to God. He must have the Divine confirmation of his choice, else he dares not proceed. The whole matter is of utmost importance, to choose a wife for the son of promise, and God will surely give direction at his humble request. 1. He was to go so far as he could in making the choice. 2. She must be such an one as will respond cordially to his application for water. She would then have the marks of a good temper, besides the personal attractions which he could only judge at first sight. Form and feature and healthful aspect, and charms for the eye of which a stranger could judge, were to be seconded by a prompt and hearty response to the request of a stranger for water. How a little act of kindness will display the disposition! The politeness and culture which will give water to the stranger will speak volumes in regard to the character. How indispensable in a good wife is a good disposition, beyond any mere outward charms. How requisite, above all, is the approbation of God in so momentous a choice.—*(Jacobus.)*

"She that thou hast appointed." The will and design of God is the ultimate aim of prayer.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 15—31.

THE FINGER OF PROVIDENCE IN THE APPOINTMENT OF A BRIDE FOR ISAAC.

In the events related here Abraham's steward had evident proof that God was blessing his designs, and was bringing them to the desired issue. He could plainly see the finger of Providence :—

I. In the prompt and complete answer given to his prayer. "Before he had done speaking" Rebekah appeared at the well (verse 15.) The suddenness of her appearance, taken together with the fact that her conduct and bearing were such as he looked for, would produce the impression upon his mind that his prayer was already answered. The sight of this comely damsel at such a seasonable moment, her dignified bearing, her kind disposition, her unaffected simplicity, would strike him as a distinct interference of Providence. He could not ascribe it all to chance or mere accident. His pious mind was disposed to believe and to see the manifest finger of God. The maiden appeared on the scene which he had pictured to his mind's eye, and displayed all the qualities which he had looked for in a bride for Isaac. She was *civil and courteous* (verses 18, 24.) She was *open and sincere.* There was no pretence, or acting a part. She was *kind* (verses 18-20.) It was a good action, and done to a stranger. She was *simple and unaffected.* There was no suspicion or affected coyness. He could not see all these things without feeling that God had answered his prayer.

II. In the control of apparent accidents. The events that happened, though most remarkable in their wonderful fitness, were yet in themselves probable. Some might have regarded them as a lucky accident—as one of those favourable chances that will sometimes happen. But to a religious mind the most obscure and unknown causes are under the control of an all-seeing Providence, and are so regulated as to accomplish the Divine will. This incident brings one fact of God's government of mankind vividly before us, which is, that *great issues often depend upon apparently little things.* It was a simple matter to ask a stranger for a drink of water, and yet how much depended upon this! The simple maiden had no suspicion of the greatness of the issue hanging upon her cheerful and kindly compliance with the request. It is conceivable that she might have acted otherwise, and with apparent justice. This man was a foreigner, and perhaps a foe. She was a lady accustomed to be waited upon, rather than to serve. But she stood upon no dignity, nor maintained a proud and cautious reserve. Any rudeness or suspicion on her part at this time and the servant must have looked elsewhere. Thus the great destinies of the Jewish nation seemed at this moment to depend upon the bearing of this maiden in meeting a stranger at a well.

III. In the impression made upon the steward himself. Doubtless he felt that his prayer was now answered, or at least that he had received the first tokens of an answer. Still he is afraid to presume too much. 1. *He pauses to see whether Divine Providence is still leading on.* He allows time for the natural feelings of the moment to possess him. He is filled with amazement and delight. He will not, however, be too confident, but waits to see whether God is still leading him on. (Ver. 21.) When we have done our duty in the humble spirit of prayer, and when Divine light has enabled us to see a few steps in advance, we should calmly wait that more light may be granted. 2. *He acts upon the favours of Providence already received.* Believing that his way was divinely directed so far, he presents gifts to the young damsel. (Ver. 22.) These were a suitable expression of thanks for her services, and would naturally secure her goodwill for the future. Then he is encouraged to ask for the rights of hospitality, and they were graciously granted. (Verses 23–25.) He was making his way safe and sure—still looking to God for direction and success. 3. *He engages in an act of praise.* (Verses 26, 27.) He worships the Covenant God—gives thanks to the God of families who had not failed of His mercy and His truth. He felt that he had acted, up to this point, in the integrity of his heart, and that he had not wandered from the way of the Lord. His conduct in this matter is a beautiful picture of true and simple primitive piety. He seeks direction by prayer, and acknowledges the answer in humble hearty praise.

IV. In the recognition of God by all concerned. All who were concerned in the results of this embassy felt that this thing was of God. When Rebekah heard of the Lord of Abraham her feelings of wonder and piety were excited. (Verses 27, 28.) She cannot resist the impression that she is honouring a saint of God. Laban also regards this servant as one who was specially favoured by Jehovah. (Ver. 31.) He discerned by evident signs that this was a true child of God.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 15. So quick is God many times in the answer of prayers. (Isa. lxv. 24; Dan. ix. 23.) The angel had even tired himself with flight, to tell Daniel that his prayers were heard. David did but say, "I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord," and before he could do it, "God forgave the iniquity of his sin." (Psa. xxxii. 5.) —*(Trapp.)*

So forward is God to bestow His benefits upon us that they do not so much follow our prayers as prevent and go before them. "And it shall come to pass, that before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." (Isa. lxv. 24.)—*(Bochart.)*

The eastern women sometimes carry their jars upon their heads; but Rebekah's was carried upon her shoulder. In such a case, the jar is not supposed to have been placed upright on the shoulder, but held by one of the handles, with the hand over the shoulder, and suspended in this manner on the back, held, I should imagine, by the right hand over the left shoulder. Consequently, when it was presented to Abraham's servant, that he might drink out of it, it was to be gently moved over the left arm, and being suspended by one hand, while the other probably was placed under the bottom of the jar; it was in that position presented to Abraham's servant and his attendants to drink out of. "And she hasted and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him to drink." (Verse 18.)—*(Harmer.)*

Verse 16. Beauty is the characteristic of the Church, which is lovely and fair in the sight of God. It was fitting that the mother of the Church, which God was now calling out of the world, should be beautiful.

Some suppose that this well was a cistern of rain-water. We have seen such cut in the rock above ground, and we have seen wells or fountains reached by a declivity or by steps. He had watched her in this movement, and was clear that she fulfilled all the conditions as to personal manners.—*(Jacobus.)*

Verses 16, 17. How is it, she might have answered, that thou being a foreigner,—and for anything I know a foe,—askest drink of me, a native of this country? What am I, that I should minister to thee? Or, what art thou to me, that thou shouldest expect this favour at my hands? It was good for Rebekah that she did not answer thus. No other opportunity would probably have been given to her; no second appeal would have been made to her. And it was good for another woman, who, long after, met another stranger, —"wearied with his journey," at another well,—that when she met His request, "Give me to drink," with the churlish question, "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?" It was good for her that she had a different person from Abraham's servant to deal with. A rude reception of this sort might have ended once and for ever the negotiation for a marriage treaty which this messenger from Canaan was about to open. But that other Messenger from the heavenly Canaan is not so easily repelled. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. (Isa. lv. 8.)—*(Candlish.)*

Little things are often the most reliable test of character. They reveal the chief and prevailing dispositions of our nature far more truthfully than a well studied and prepared part acted on great occasions. Faithfulness in little things affords the best promise of faithfulness in great.

Verses 18, 19. Her response was prompt and cordial. She was bearing her pitcher upon her shoulder, as we suppose, and naturally let it down upon her hand. This civility and courtesy added to the already favourable impression. It happened somewhat differently with us. We came up to a cistern hewn out of the limestone rock, and were very thirsty after a hot ride on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. The cistern was well supplied with rainwater, covered over with green scum. Our dragoman let down his skin bucket or bottle by a cord, and drew up the water clear and cool from beneath the surface. He poured it into a cup and was handing it to one of our ladies, when an old sheikh, who had escorted us, seized the cup, demanding to be served before the lady. On his being stoutly refused by our dragoman, he mounted his beast in a surly mood and rode off immediately.—*(Jacobus.)*

The maiden manifests that very bountifulness of spirit, which the woman of Samaria not only wanted, but thought it strange that she should be expected to possess. Without suspicion or inquiry, without upbraiding, she is impatient to respond to the stranger's call—she is in haste to minister to his wants. "She hasted," it is said,—and said, not once, but twice,—as if to indicate her promptness to meet the demand made upon her, and to supply the wants not only of the wayfarer himself but of his cattle.—*(Candlish.)*

She now proceeded quite according to the sign which the steward had named. Everything thus goes forward most satisfactorily. She proposes, in her open-hearted way, to furnish water for his camels also, using even the language which the servant had used in his prayer. This indicated, most clearly, the hand of God in the matter. —*(Jacobus.)*

Verse 20. In the vicinity of Nazareth we noticed such a well or fountain with a stone trough filled, and at evening the women were gathered there, filling their stone jars at the well, and carrying them on their heads. The trough would also be a convenience for cattle to drink. Around Jerusalem, Damascus, and Hebron the water is conveyed from pools or reservoirs outside the city, in earthen pipes running under cover, but having openings at intervals along the roadside for the cattle to drink.—*(Jacobus.)*

Genuine goodness of disposition does not proceed with a dull and melancholy movement, but is sprightly and cheerful. The value of such duties lies not only in what they bestow, but rather in the attractive and willing manner in which they are done. This is the kind of service which God loves.

Rebekah was a true mother of the Church, for it is the office of the Church to perform large and cheerful services for mankind.

Verse 21. He was rapt in admiration of the Divine providence which had made the event to correspond so remarkably with his desires. The maiden's conduct; so amiable in itself, and so exactly in unison with his previous wishes, struck him with a kind of amazement, accompanied by a momentary hesitation whether all could be true. Thus, the disciples of Jesus wondered when Peter was cast into prison; and when their prayers were heard, and Peter stood without, knocking at the gate, they could not credit the joyful news, but said, "It is his angel." We pray for blessings, and when our prayers are answered we can scarcely believe them to be so.—(*Bush.*)

The mind, like the eye, is often dazzled and confounded by excess of light. We require time to adjust our souls to new and sudden situations. Amazement is the first effect of the appearing of God's great goodness.

It is not wise to rush into too sudden conclusions from favourable appearances. It is better to wait and see whether the future will confirm our first impressions.

To find out whether God has prospered us, we must have successive proofs of His goodness. His guiding hand must lead us every step of our way. —

No wonder the good man marvelled. Such alacrity of attention to a poor way-worn traveller did indeed betoken a gracious disposition. And the circumstance fitted in so aptly to his previous train of holy meditation, that he could not fail to recognise an answer to his prayer. It was as if the Lord were saying to him in this remarkable providence, "Be still and know that I am God."—(*Candlish.*)

Verse 22. Is it not in opposition with 1 Tim. ii. 9, 10; 2 Tim. iii. 4, 5, to put on these ornaments? We answer, 1. Rebekah had no conceit of herself in connection with them; 2. As Sarah was a princess, so Rebekah became the daughter of a prince, and we cannot refuse to distinguished persons a certain pre-eminence in clothing and ornaments; 3. The great abundance of gold, precious stones, and jewels in the Levitical cultus, was not to contribute to pride.—(*Starke.*)

The thing really intended seems to be a ring or jewel for the nose; but our translators, having no knowledge of such an ornament, which seemed to them to imply an absurdity, have carefully avoided the true idea everywhere, except in Isa. iii. 21, the translator of which portion had probably gained some information, not possessed by the others, of this peculiarity of Oriental ornament. Yet all their care could not preclude an occasional allusion to it, as in Prov. xi. 22, where it could not but be rendered "a jewel in a swine's snout." The extensive use of nose ornaments among the Arabian and other females of the East having now become known, modern translators render the present text "nose ring," as is done in the Arabic and Persian versions.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 23. As there were no public-houses for travellers, only at best the *Khan* or caravan-serai, and as it was and still is customary for strangers to seek a lodging with the Sheikh of the village, this question about accommodations was proper, and not surprising.—(*Jacobus.*)

It is sufficient if we have clear light for the next duty which lies before us. When Providence opens our way we should follow.

Verse 24. She promptly told of her family relation; and it proved to be of Abraham's kindred—the daughter of his nephew.—(*Jacobus.*)

Another step in the paths of Providence was verefied. God rewards faithful duty by granting more and more a knowledge of His will.

Verse 25. In keeping with her cordiality; already shown at the well, is her hospitality, in which she goes beyond his request or lodging, and assures him of straw and provender besides. The *straw* was chopped straw for mixture with *provender*—as grasses and herbage, or barley. The term for provender means *feed* in the general.—(*Jacobus.*)

Had Rebekah done no more than Eliezer had prayed for, we might have supposed that she acted not as a free agent, but was impelled to it by the absolutely controlling power of God; but as she exceeds all that was requested, we see that it sprang from her native benevolence, and sets her conduct in a most amiable point of view.—(*A. Clarke.*)

It is well observed by an interpreter, that in the narration of this story (which yet seemeth to be of light and trivial matters) the Spirit of God is very exact and large; whereas other things wherein great mysteries are infolded (as the history of Melchizedek etc.), are set down in few words; that man might consider God's wisdom and Providence in things of least esteem amongst men. I add, that all may see what delight He takes in the meanest actions and speeches of His dearest children; when the great acts and exploits of Nimrod, Ninus, and other grandees of the world are not once mentioned, but lie shrouded in the sheet of oblivion or shame.—(*Trapp.*)

God rewards those who seek Him with more than they ask or think.

Verses 26, 27. See how he relisheth of his master's house, and showeth a gracious heart, ready to offer up a sacrifice of praise, wherever God shall please to set it up an altar. The same word in Greek (χάρις) signifieth grace and thanks; to show, that as any man hath more grace, he is more grateful to God and man. It is observable also, that our Saviour sets these two together,—"the unthankful, and the evil." (Luke vi. 35).—(*Trapp.*)

Such a sight is fitted to move deeply the simple and earnest soul of the guileless maiden. The venerable aspect of the stranger, surprised into a sudden act of most profound devotion could not but strike her heart; and the mention of the name of Abraham, of whom doubtless she had often heard in her father's house,—and with whose migration, narrated as a household tale, she had been taught to associate something of the mysterious and the supernatural,—could not fail to call forth her feelings of wonder, expectancy, and awe. Who is this to whom she has been unawares rendering what appears to be received as so remarkable a service? It is but a little cold water that she has been giving; a boon that she would not withhold from the poorest pilgrim she might chance to meet with at a well. But what a burst of pious gratitude does it cause! And what a discovery does it occasion! she is "not forgetful to entertain strangers"; and as "thereby some have entertained angels unawares," (Heb. xiii. 2), so Rebekah on this occasion reaps a rich reward for the attention she has been unconsciously paying to an honoured saint of God. The old man who is the object of her apparently trifling courtesy and kindness, as if bent under the weight of an insupportable obligation, "bows down his head and worships God. And the words he utters in his ecstacy and thankfulness, bring home to her as a present reality all that from her childhood she has doubtless been wont to hear, of what was probably the most remarkable event in the family history, —the strange adventure of the old patriarch called so mysteriously away long ago into a distant and a sort of dreamy land. Well may she be in haste to communicate the surprising intelligence she has so unexpectedly obtained.—(*Candlish.*)

Here is a fine example of a man who "acknowledged God in all His ways." He takes no steps without prayer, nor receives any blessing thereby vouchsafed without rendering thanksgiving and praise.

The servant's thanksgiving. 1. The piety of it. He does not ascribe his success to chance or fortune, but to God. Moreover he adores God by His Covenant name as the Redeemer. 2. The confidence of it. (1) Founded upon God's dealings in the past. He had never failed in His mercy and His truth to Abraham. Therefore He might be thanked for the past with that confidence which is encouraged to hope much for the future. It is safe to trust Divine mercy and truth. (2) Founded upon a consciousness of his own integrity. This servant knew that he was in the way of the Lord, that he was led to the house of his master's brethren by Divine direction. Therefore he was sure from whom these blessings came.

The Bible is a revelation not only of God's truth, but also of His mercy. Were it not thus it would bring no glad tidings to men.

It is a comfort to know that the father of believers is represented as a man who never was forsaken of God's mercy and truth. All the children of faith in every age have this experience.

Verse 28. Rapid movements become excited feelings. Joyful feet travel swiftly. It is so, notably, with the highest spiritual feelings. When God enlarges our hearts with them then we are ready to run in the ways of His commandments.

This praise to God was probably offered while Rebekah was running to her home with the exciting news. It would be to the female part of the house to whom she would naturally relate all the facts and all her thoughts. How natural the picture! The *mother*, and those who cluster around her, will first get the interesting news. The family was settled in a fixed abode, as would seem.—(*Jacobus.*)

Verses 29–31. From what we afterwards learn of Laban, it is not perhaps doing him injustice to suppose that the golden ornaments had great influence in prompting a behaviour which had the appearance of being highly disinterested and generous. His whole history shows him to have been a mercenary man, and quite susceptible to the impressions which the display of great wealth would make upon a covetous mind. But, whatever were his motives, his treatment of the servant was kind. Finding him at the well modestly waiting for a further invitation, he accosts him in language that would have befitted the lips of a much better man.—(*Bush.*)

The presents to his sister assure him that this is the envoy of some man of wealth and position. The name of Jehovah was evidently not unfamiliar to Laban's ears. He calls this stranger blessed of Jehovah on account of his language, demeanour, and manifest prosperity. The knowledge and worship of the living God, the God of truth and mercy, was still retained in the family of Nahor.—(*Murphy.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 32–49

THE MARRIAGE TREATY.

I. Its religious element. 1. *The sense of instant duty.* The steward was intent upon the commission entrusted to him by his master, and refuses to take his food until he has discharged it (verse 33). He felt that he had to perform a duty to God as well as to man; for Abraham was in covenant with God, and he had taken a solemn oath to be faithful to his master in this matter. The pious man regards all duty as having reference to God, and instantly obeys the suggestions of conscience herein. To make haste to obey is an essential mark of godliness. 2. *A recognition of God's gracious dealings.* The steward felt that God had greatly blessed his master—had designed to make him a great nation, and for that end had wrought a special act of His power (verse 36). His master had taken all due care to make a holy alliance for his son. He himself had prayed that God might prosper his way. He now recites to this company the things which had befallen him during the course of his journey. He is convinced by the evident favour of Providence that the Lord's hand had been in the business from the first, and now he confidently commits all his way to the same Divine guidance (verse 48). 3. *A solemn sense of responsibility.* (1.) *To man.* He had a trust committed to him. His master was worthy of that trust. The business itself was right in the sight of God, and most important for the highest welfare of the human race. (2.) *To God.* This man had learned that the Lord had intended a great destiny for the family of Abraham, which was to be the hope of the world. He must feel that he was not acting a part in an ordinary history. He has to bring the kingdom of God nigh unto this house. He had come from a family where the fear and worship of Jehovah were known, and which alone had any recent revelation from God, or was marked by the Covenant seal. Truly he is coming to offer to Laban's household a share in the privileges of Abraham's calling. He is the bearer of the message of salvation.

II. Its economic element. The steward gives an account of Abraham's wealth and position (verse 35). He knew that the parents of this well-bred damsel would never consent to give their daughter to a man of mean circumstances, and living one hundred miles away, nor to one of ignoble or degraded family. He takes care, therefore, to state that his master is rich, and that the bride would have a suitable home and congenial society. Still, with that pious feeling which marked him hitherto, he takes equal care to note that the riches of his master were *righteously* gotten. "The Lord hath blessed my master greatly" (verse 35). He also gave suitable presents (verse 47). He treats her as one who is to enter such a distinguished family. In all this transaction the religious and the economic elements are mixed in due proportion. The men who most believed in the supernatural, and who had most abundant witness of it, were the men who used the most care in the employment of common prudence and skill. This man does not blindly rely upon miracles alone, but uses human means and proprieties to their proper extent and trusts for the blessing of God.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 32. Being warmly invited, the man enters the house. Laban is the actor here, and in the following duties of hospitality. It comes out here, incidentally, as it was reasonable to infer from the number of camels, that Abraham's steward had a retinue of servants with him. The crowning act of an Eastern reception is the presenting of food.—*(Murphy).*

Thoughtful and seasonable acts of kindness—a worthy feature of those simple times.

Verse 33. He meant to act, perhaps, upon some such principle as that laid down by our Lord for the guidance of those whom He sent out as ambassadors. (Luke x. 8-11). He has substantially to set before them the salvation of the Gospel, inviting them to become partakers of it, and to cast in their lot with the people whose God is the Lord. To press for a decision upon this point is his first and chief concern, to which even the supply of his necessary food is altogether subordinate. He is in earnest,—as a far greater Messenger was in earnest, when He too had to deal with the woman whom He met at the well about her spiritual good,—her separation from old connections that she might be the Lord's handmaid,—and found the task so engrossing as to make him forget his own most pressing wants: (John iv. 31-34). So, in some corresponding measure, Abraham's servant felt in reference to the commission with which he was charged. It was his meal also, as it was the Lord's, to get his commission well executed in obedience to his master and his master's God; and the execution of it took precedence with him even of his necessary food.—(*Candlish*).

Verses 34–49. Eliezer's bride-wooing, the first speech in the Bible, a fit beginning for the whole circle of Biblical speeches.—(*Lange.*)

And how simply does he go about the execution of his commission! He does little more than narrate the Lord's dealings with Abraham in Canaan, and with himself on his journey thence. As a matter of course, we may be sure that he dwells somewhat more at length on the details of his master's pilgrimage than the brief summary given in this discourse might indicate. Nor can we doubt that he opens up, at least in part, the fulness of the blessing with which "the Lord had blessed his master greatly," as having in it a rich store of spiritual as well as temporal benefits. At all events, it is the Lord's blessing upon Abraham and his seed that this devout and upright man holds out as the chief, and indeed the only recommendation of the suit he has to urge. For, in what remains of his address, beyond a plain recital of the things that had befallen him, with a pious reference throughout to the manifest grace and goodness of the Lord in the leadings of His holy providence—the good man uses no arguments whatever to enforce the proposal he has to make to Laban's household. Not "with excellency of speech or of wisdom"—not "with enticing words of man's wisdom does he come to them," declaring unto them the testimony of God. If his mission is to be successful—if his message is to be believed by them—their "faith is not to stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." It is to be no triumph of persuasive eloquence; nor is it by any varnish of a subtle and seductive tongue that the maiden's choice is to be determined and the consent of her family obtained. The Lord's hand has been in this business from the first; and it must be left in His hand to the last. The servant can but deliver his plain tale, with all plainness of speech, and await such results as the Lord may be pleased to appoint. Such is this honest ambassador's honest discharge of his embassy. —(*Candlish.*)

The offer of Abraham's servant to the house of Nahor is suggestive of the offer of God's salvation to mankind. 1. Salvation is of the Lord—by His direction and will (verse 48.) 2. Salvation is a miracle of Divine mercy. Isaac—on whose account these things happened—was born by a miracle. Forgiveness of transgressions comes to us out of the ordinary course. Nature teaches no doctrine of forgiveness. Her laws punish all transgressors without remedy. When salvation is brought, God's own arm is apparent. 3. The consequences of rejecting the offer of salvation are serious. Had this offer made to Nahor's household been rejected, the steward must have looked in some other direction. They would have lost a distinguished and honourable place in human history. They would have put themselves outside the circle of religious privileges. The rejection of salvation is—to say the least—the rejection of honour and dignity, of a place in the family of God.

"And the Lord hath blessed my master" (verse 35.) Ministers, Christ's paranymphs, must likewise woo for Christ by setting forth His great wealth, and not to speak one word for Christ and two for themselves, as those did in Phil. i. 15. John Baptist was no such spokesman. (John iii. 29.) It is the special office of the ministry to lay Christ open, to hold up the tapestry, and let men see him as He is set forth, (Heb. i. 2, 3), that they may be sick of love, for otherwise Christ is like to have but a cold suit of it.—*(Trapp.)*

"And I will put the earring upon her face" (verse 47.) So did Christ put upon His spouse His own comeliness, which was a jewel on her forehead, an earring in her ear, and a beautiful crown upon her head, (Ezek. xvi. 12–14);—whence she is called Callah, of the perfection of her beauty and bravery, (Jer. ii. 32); and Hephzibah, (Isa. lxii. 4), of His delight in her; since He hath purified her as Esther, sanctified her, (Eph. v. 26), and so beautified her that now He "rejoiceth over her as a bridegroom doth over his bride." (Isa. lxii. 5.) Yea, He "resteth in His love," and will seek no further; He "joyeth over her with singing" as well paid for His choice. (Zeph. iii. 17.)—(*Trapp.*)

"The Lord, before whom I walk, will send His angel with thee, and prosper thy way" (verse 40.) Eliezer.

the earthly messenger of Abraham, in the convoy of the heavenly messengers. A pious diplomat, accompanied by the angel of the Lord. The diplomats of this world are often accompanied by demons.—(*Lange.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 50–60.

THE SUCCESS OF THE MARRIAGE TREATY.

I. Due to the manifest interposition of Providence. The impression made upon the mind of the father and brother of Rebekah was, that the hand of God was clearly evident in this matter. They felt as if they could not interfere. They could not utter a word by way of expressing an independent opinion or wish. "The thing proceedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good" (verse 50.)

II. Acknowledged by suitable acts of devotion. We find we are dealing all along with a history which is continually looking towards God. The actors in it are ready to refer all success to God, and to acknowledge every benefit with pious gratitude. 1. *By acts of worship.* Abraham's servant "worshipped the Lord, bowing himself to the earth" (verse 52.) This is the supreme act of religion—prostration before that Being who is holier, greater, and higher than we are. The sense of the Divine goodness in favouring his mission was uppermost in the mind of this man. But it is the assurance of that Goodness which is the confidence and comfort of devotion. Without the conviction of His goodness, His greatness would overpower us and make us afraid. 2. *By faith and ready obedience.* The brother and mother of the damsel naturally plead for a few day's delay (verse 55.) But the servant is so convinced that the hand of God is in this matter that he urges haste. If this was the bride selected by Providence, surely there was no need for any further delay. When the matter is mentioned to Rebekah, she makes up her mind in a moment, and declares her willingness at once to go with the servant (verse 58.) Her obedience is instant and cheerful. A clear message from heaven leads to sudden changes in conduct. Such was the case with St. Paul. "*Immediately* I conferred not with flesh and blood" (Gal. i. 16.) 3. *By human benedictions.* God had already blessed, and now man must bless (verse 60.) It is the dignity and privilege of man that he can both act and think after God. Thus there is human forgiveness as well a Divine. The brightest discoveries of the human intellect are but the thoughts that have dwelt from eternity in the mind of God at length revealed to man. These benedictions were given in *faith.* There was faith in a great future for the family of God (verse 60.) There would be a witness for God throughout human history—a final victory for his people. "Let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them."

III. Followed by a grateful sense of relief. The servant can now eat and drink, for his duty is discharged and God has now shown him that his mission is a success (verse 54.) There is repose and satisfaction when we are conscious of duty faithfully done; but while the duty is impending, the thought of it swallows up all else—every idea of personal comfort or safety. It is the mark of a pious mind when we esteem the commandments of God more than our necessary food.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 50. The affect of the appeal which, with such unadorned simplicity, Abraham's servant addressed to the family whose acquaintance he had so strangely made, is not merely an instance of the primitive and confiding hospitality of these times, but a proof of the same Divine interposition in which this whole procedure originated being continued down to its close. The

Divine Spirit is very unequivocally at work, giving efficacy to the Divine message, moving and inclining the hearts of those to whom it comes, and making them willing in the day of the Lord's power. The brother and father —the latter in all probability being now, in his old age, represented to a large extent by his son, who in the whole of this affair seems to act for him as the head of the house,—the relatives, in short, of the woman thus strangely courted as the bride of a Prince Royal, whose person and whose kingly heritage are alike unknown,—cannot withstand the evidence of a Divine warrant, which the whole transaction bears. They frankly own their conviction. It is the Lord; what can we say or do?—(*Candlish*).

God's will, when clearly made known. 1. Puts an end to all doubt. There is no longer room for any question. We walk in the light. 2. Determines our duty, which is unquestioning obedience. 3. It should be accepted with resignation. Even when something which is grievous for the present is imposed upon us, it is enough to know that such is God's will.

This simple belief in the presence and energy of a living God working in human affairs was the soul of the Patriarchal religion.

Here they acknowledge, 1. Jehovah's authority in managing the affairs of men. 2. That the actual progress of this matter was brought about by Him. Though they lived in corrupt times and places, yet they acknowledge God in the ways of His providence. So God did preserve some discoveries of Himself outside His Church. 3. That no opposition should be offered to this providence. "We shall not be able to gainsay, evil or good" (so the Heb.) In which passage they acknowledge such clear discovery of God's will in this matter, that they take it as irresistible. Therefore the meaning of this expression is well paraphrased by the lxx., "we cannot gainsay thee anything in this matter, either in pretence of evil or good, to urge anything against God's mind which seemeth to be so dear to us that we are included in it."—(*Hughes*).

Verse 51. So plain an interposition of Providence admits of no refusal on the part of those who revere the Lord. Bethuel now appears as a concurring party. Laban, as the full brother of Rebekah, has a voice in the disposal of her hand; but the father only has the power to ratify the contract.—(*Murphy.*)

The whole conduct of this affair is calculated to surprise an European reader. A servant is sent on a distant journey, with full powers to select a wife, and conclude a marriage for his master's son. The servant addresses himself to the lady's father and brother, and they agree to his proposals without consulting Rebekah. The agent makes valuable presents to the lady and her relations, and carries her away, and Isaac and Rebekah meet as man and wife without having ever seen each other before; but all this is most precisely analagous to uses which still prevail in the East, with some small diversity in different nations. We will state the process of a marriage of a young couple in Persia, which seems, on the whole, to present a very close parallel to this patriarchal procedure. When a young man becomes marriageable, his parents begin to look about among their kindred and acquaintance for a suitable partner for him, frequently assisting their inquiries or leaving the matter entirely to a confidential servant—generally the young man's old nurse—who goes about from house to house, and having found a suitable object, endeavours to create a mutual prepossession, by speaking to each of the other. Very often, however, the whole matter is concluded without any reference to the parties most immediately interested. When the parents have found a suitable female, they proceed to the house of her father, and make their overtures to him; and if they are acceptable, he denotes his acquiescence by ordering sweetmeats to be brought. A few days after, another meeting is held at the same place, and then it is finally settled what the parents of the young man are to give in his behalf to the bride.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 52. With this simple, but interesting account, the whole family is overcome; one sentiment bows every mind. Rebekah says nothing; but her heart is full. It is an affair in which little or nothing is left for creatures to decide. Such was the happy result of this truly religious courtship; and the good man, who saw God in all things, still keeps up his character. Hearing their words, he bowed himself to the earth, and worshipped God! How sweet would all our temporal concerns be rendered if they were thus intermixed with godliness!—(*Fuller.*)

This act of worship implies—1. *Faith.* He was convinced that there was a living God working throughout all this affair, and that events were so shaped as clearly to indicate what the will of the Lord was. 2. *Gratitude.* He felt that he had received favour from the Lord for himself and for his master. It is the good God that we worship, and gratitude should be the uppermost feeling in our mind towards Him. 3. *Reverence.* He bowed himself to the earth as worshipping the Highest. It is this feeling of reverence for the one great God which ennobles such histories as these recorded in the Bible.

Verse 53. The main things being settled, he, according to the customs of those times, "presents the bride elect with jewels of silver, jewels of gold, and raiment" suited to the occasion; and further to conciliate the esteem of the family "he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things." Presents when given from sincere affection are very proper, and productive of good effects. It is by a mutual interchange of kind offices that love is often kindled, and always kept alive. Our Saviour accepted the presents which were offered Him, not only of food, but raiment, and even the anointing of His feet. Where love exists it is natural and grateful to express it in acts of kindness.—(*Fuller.*)

She is treated as the great King, the Church's Bridegroom, treats everyone whom He espouses to Himself;—as He will treat thee, whoever thou art, to whom the message of His mercy comes. He invites thee, by His ambassadors pleading with thee,—by His providence waiting for thee,—by His word dwelling in thee,—by His Spirit striving with thee,—He invites thee to become His. From the very first He enforces His invitation by substantial tokens of His earnestness in seeking thee. Thou hast ample proof given to thee of His love in the cross He bore for thee, in the Gospel He sends to thee, in the blessed peace, and free pardon, and full renewal He holds out to thee. Even the opening of His treaty of espousals with thee is not without many a sweet and precious gift of grace, such as may well suffice to give thee confidence in closing with His overtures, and casting thyself into His arms. For whatever ministry or immediate embassy he may employ, He is nearer to thee by far than was the suitor for Rebekah's love to the damsel whom by proxy he wooed. He who wooes thee knows thee by name. He is not going in search of the objects of His regard at a venture. Nor does He send His messengers to grope in the dark. This, so far as they themselves are concerned, may be the condition of their embassy. But "the Lord knoweth them that are His." And to thee, O meek and contrite soul! to thee He comes,—through human instrumentality perhaps, but with unerring wisdom and kindness,—demanding thee as His own. The instant thou consentest to be His, He causes all the treasures of His wisdom and knowledge,—all the riches of His grace and glory,—to be opened up to thee. Of all that is His there is nothing that He will withold, or refuse to share with thee.—(*Candlish.*)

Verses 54, 55. When our duty is done, we can best enjoy ease and refreshment.

Very natural is the remonstrance which the brother, and especially the mother of the bride, addressed to the impatient servant of Abraham. And whether they asked for a respite of ten days, or, as some say, of ten months, or even years, before the mother bids her daughter her last adieu—it is a touch of genuine tenderness such as we would not willingly lose in this narrative. For it is a narrative which proves its own truth by its being so thoroughly, and all throughout, true to nature.—*(Candlish.)*

Verses 56–58. Nor is it a trifling evidence of the chosen virgin's faith, that she is enabled to withstand the pleading for delay which has nothing but instinctive fondness to support it, in deference to the solemn appeal of one so unequivocally under the direction of heaven as the messenger to whom her friends have already consented to surrender her. She has taken the decisive step when, in the dark as some might think, she has resolved to peril all upon the truth of the singular embassy that has come to seek her. And now, when it is left to herself to say how soon the step shall become irrevocable, her reply is prompt. She balances the fond reluctance of her family to part with her—a reluctance which, however grateful to her feelings, has no force at all as an argument addressed to her faith—against the clear appeal which the holy man who has called her makes to the God whose very favour urges him to haste. And she cannot hesitate for a moment. Having made up her mind to a very painful sacrifice and a very serious risk, she feels that to doubt or to deliberate any longer would be to be lost. "Now," with her, is the accepted time; "now is the day of salvation." What is to be done had best be done quickly. Let there be no halting between two opinions; no hesitancy—no yielding to the impulse that would gain time and prompt dangerous delay. Having put her hand to the plough, she will not draw back. She hears a voice powerfully speaking to her, and saying, "Go forward."—*(Candlish.)*

The Church promptly obeys the call of her Lord, and listens to no other voice. She is persuaded that in Him alone all her joy and prosperity are to be found.

This does not seem to be a question as to Rebekah's consent to the marriage. The contract was lawfully concluded by the parent. It was understood to be right and proper. Besides, it could easily be seen that in this case Rebekah's heart had been won by the proposal. She acted plainly from a high principle of faith in the proposal as directed so manifestly by God. "A prudent wife is from the Lord." (Prov. xix. 14.)—*(Jacobus.)*

Verse 59. How beautiful! The old maid-servant of the house, who had cared for her and brought her up, must go with her. This is a custom still to be found in that land. The nurse's name was Deborah. (Ch. xxxv. 8.) She died before her mistress, and in the service of the family. The one who, even more than the mother, knew all about her and could best do for her, and meet her wants, she was to her a choice memorial of home.—*(Jacobus.)*

It was a beautiful characteristic of ancient manners thus to care for faithful servants in their old age. This is one of those lessons of kindness which the Gospel should only the more impress upon us.

How often have scenes like this led my mind to the patriarchal age! The daughter is about, for the first time, to leave the paternal roof; the servants are all in confusion; each refers to things long gone by—each wishes to do something to attract the attention of his young mistress. One says, "Ah! do not forget him who nursed you when an infant;" another, "How often did I bring you the beautiful lotus from the distant tank." "Did I not always conceal your faults?" The mother comes to take leave; she weeps, and tenderly embraces her, saying, "My daughter, I shall see you no more: forget not your mother." The brother enfolds his sister in his arms, and promises soon to come and see her.

The father is absorbed in thought, and is only aroused by the sobs of the party. He then affectionately embraces his daughter, and tells her not to fear. The female domestics must each *smell* of the poor girl, and the men touch her feet. As Rebekah had her nurse to accompany her, so at this day the *aya* (the nurse), who has from infancy brought up the bride, goes with her to the new scene. She is her adviser, her assistant, and friend; and to her she will tell all her hopes and all her fears. —(*Roberts.*)

Verse 60. Thus the history of Abraham is repeated in Rebekah. Like him, she went forth in faith; and the family invoke upon her the blessings promised to him (Gen. xxiii. 17).

From the numerous instances which are recorded in the Scriptures of those who were aged or holy giving their *blessing*, may be seen the importance which was attached to such benedictions. Has a son or daughter to leave a father, an aged friend, or a priest, a blessing is always given. To be the mother of a numerous progeny is considered a great honour. Hence parents often say to their daughters, "Be thou the mother of *thousands.*" Beggars also, when relieved, say to the mistress of the house, "Ah, madam, *millions* will come from you!"—(*Roberts.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 61-67.

A Primeval Marriage.

Here we have a beautiful and touching picture of a primeval marriage, in which the following characteristics are remarkable:—

I. **Its simplicity.** The servant had returned from his journey, and now "told Isaac all things that he had done." (Verse 66.) To him he introduces Rebekah. Isaac takes her in the presence of all witnesses, and she becomes his wife. There was no elaborate form or ceremony. The whole transaction was reduced to the utmost simplicity.

II. **Its purity.** The motives of all concerned were honest and sincere. As for Rebekah, she was modest and retiring, though simple and trustful. As for Isaac, "he loved her." (Verse 67.) Love is essential to a real marriage, and where this is wanting that pure and holy institution is dishonoured. Everything belonging to this marriage was real and true. It had a pure motive and a pure end in view.

III. **Its godliness.** This was truly a marriage in the Lord. It was pervaded by a spirit of reverence towards God and a desire for His blessing. Isaac prepares himself for this favour of Providence by prayer and meditation. (Verse 63.) This quiet and retiring duty became him, for he was rather a man of thoughtful and reflective habits than of action. Probably he now meditated upon the time when he was bound upon the altar, and when God wrought for him a wonderful deliverance. He would naturally hope that great things were still in store for him. The spirit of meditation was a suitable attitude of mind in which to await the events that were impending.

IV. **It is illustration of the principle of unity in diversity.** In this principle we have the true idea of marriage—the conjunction of things that are unlike. The characters of Isaac and Rebekah were most diverse. They were truly complements of each other, and when brought together made a complete whole. Isaac was passive, obedient, submissive; and on the other hand Rebekah was modest, trustful, and impulsive. The deficiencies of one were supplied by the other, and both together made a strong and full-orbed character.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 61. Rebekah, like Abraham, was one of the children of faith. Like him she obeyed what she believed to be the voice of God, and went out not knowing whither she went. It is true that God spoke *directly* to Abraham, and that Rebekah followed the guidance of a man who was charged to carry out the Divine purpose. And herein *we* are represented, for in the Bible we listen to holy men who have received a message from God.

Her damsels. These were her attendants besides her nurse. These were probably given to her as part of her patrimony. Rebekah went in company with Eliezer, and the damsels (attendants, and nurse, and retinue) followed in a train or caravan.—(*Jacobus.*)

A tiresome and a tedious journey it was, but for a good husband. Suffer we with and for Christ, "that we may be glorified together" (Rom. viii. 17), when the marriage shall be consummated. Heaven will pay for all. What though thou ride on a trotting camel? it is to be married. He that rides to be crowned will not think much of a rainy day.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 62. Isaac was just come from the entering in of that place. This may mean that here he resided at this time. It was the well where the Covenant Angel had met Hagar (Gen. xvi. 14). *He was living in the south country.* And in ch. xxv. 11, it is said that he dwelt by this well, and he was just now coming (or come) from that direction towards Beersheba, his father's house, to learn the result. Some suppose that he had been thither on account of its association with the family history and the omnipresence of the Covenant Angel, and had there laid this important matter before God. This would be a reason for noting this incidental fact. This view would be sustained by the connection—*he went out into the field to meditate.*—(*Jacobus.*)

This place was well calculated to awaken thoughts of an overruling Providence. To every religious mind there are such sacred spots upon earth.

Verse 63. This is a characteristic of Isaac's retiring contemplative word. Abraham was the active, authoritative father; Isaac was the passive, submissive son. To meditate was to hold converse with his own thoughts, to ponder on the import of that never-to-be-forgotten scene, when he was laid on the altar by a father's hand, and a ram caught in the thicket became his substitute, and to pour out his soul unto the God of his salvation. In this hour of his grave reflection comes his destined bride with her faithful escort upon his view.—(*Murphy*).

She found Isaac engaged in prayer and meditation; two things from which we have sadly fallen. We are not the giants in prayer that our fathers were.—(*Robertson*).

Important interests were pending upon the results of this servant's mission. Isaac therefore, awaited them with prayer and meditation.

The closing hour of the day, the still time of evening, is most welcome to meditation. The labour of the day is over, but its mercies and cares and anxieties are still fresh in our mind. We can gather these up by meditation, until they find expression in trustful and thankful prayer.

Much power and fervour in the Church of God are wasted for the want of that guidance and direction which only meditation can give.

By meditation alone can we make Divine truth the real possession of our souls.

As meditation and prayer are the right improvement of mercies past, so they are the best preparative for mercies yet expected. Isaac could not have put himself in a more suitable posture for welcoming the anticipated blessings than that in which he is here represented, nor in one which would have been more apt to ensure its being made more substantial and durable. As a general fact, it may safely be affirmed that those husbands and wives, are likely to prove the greatest blessings to each other whose union is brought about in answer to prayer. "A prudent wife is from the Lord."—(*Bush.*)

A garment that is double dyed, dipped again and again will retain the colour a great while; so a truth which is the subject of meditation.—(*Philip Henry.*)

It will do us good to be often left alone, and sitting alone, and if we have the art of improving solitude, we shall find that we are never less alone than when alone. Meditation and prayer ought to be both our business and our delight when we are alone, while we have a God, a Christ, and a heaven, to acquaint ourselves with, and to secure an interest in, we need not want matter either for meditation or prayer, which, if they go together, will mutually befriend each other. Our walks in the field are then truely pleasant, when in them we apply ourselves to meditation and prayer. We there have a free and open prospect of the heavens above us, and the earth around us, and the hosts and riches of both by the view of which we should be led to the contemplation of the maker and owner of all. —(*Matthew Henry*).

Gerson calls meditation the nurse of prayer; Jerome calls it his paradise; Basil calls it the treasury where all the graces are locked up; Theophylact calls it the very gate and portal by which we enter into glory; and Aristotle, though a heathen, placeth felicity in the contemplation of the mind. You may read much, and hear much, yet without meditation you will never be excellent, you will never be eminent Christians.—(*Brooks*).

Verses 64, 65. Rebekah, too, is alive to the scene, and as she sees this man walking towards them alone in the field, she inquires of Eliezer as to his name. And having learned that it was none other than Isaac, ***she lighted off the camel***, to receive him, and according to the custom, she put on a veil, which covers the face, and hangs down over her breast and shoulders. It is still customary in Syria and Palestine for the bride to be introduced to the groom covered with her veil, denoting modesty and subjection to her husband.—(*Jacobus*).

We read here that as soon as Rebekah knew that her husband was coming, she alighted from her camel and took a veil, and covered herself. And this, brethren, is what we so much want; I know it to be the bane of domestic life, the want of modesty and delicacy; without Rebekah's veil affection becomes alienated, and often turns to hatred; love, to be constant; must be kept pure.—(*Robertson*).

Isaac had now another experience of the promise, "the Lord will provide."

What a meeting on that calm summer's night! It is faith meeting faith;—faith venturous and bold, meeting faith meditative and meek! On the one hand, there is a faith that not all the perils of a long journey and an unknown issue can daunt; on the other hand there is a faith that seeks quiet rest in communing with the God of nature, as the God also of covenanted grace. Rebekah, dropping thy modest veil, as if half afraid, or half ashamed, of thine own adventurous spirit; and thou, Isaac, lifting thine eyes, as if awakened out of a trance,—ye two are now one in the Lord!—(*Candlish*).

Verse 66. Isaac addresses himself, at first, not to Rebekah, but to the servant, and learns from him what is the result of his embassy. Like the quiet meditative man that he was, he does not rush to conclusions, but calmly waits for the unfolding of events. The true believer in the Divine direction and help does not make haste. While he has confidence, he is rational and collected, and he observes the proprieties of circumstances.

Ministers also must give account of their stewardship. Happy he that can present his people "as a chaste virgin to Christ," with Paul (2 Cor. xi, 2), that can say, with the prophet, "here am I, and the children that thou hast given me" (Isa. viii. 18).—(*Trapp*).

Verse 67. This is the first mention of the social affections. It comes in probably because Isaac had not before seen his bride, and now felt his heart drawn towards her, when she was presented to his view. All things were evidently done in the fear of God, as became those who were to be the progenitors of the seed of promise. We have here a description of the primeval marriage. It is a simple taking of a woman for a wife before all witnesses, and with suitable feelings and expression of reverence towards God, and of desire for His blessing. It is a pure and holy relation, reaching back into the realms of innocence, and fit to be the emblem of the humble, confiding, affectionate union between the Lord and his people.—(*Murphy*).

Thus the comfort of a wife was made to compensate for the loss of a mother. God, in infinite wisdom, saw fit to set a day of prosperity over against a day of adversity. Now He wounds our spirits by dissolving one tender union, and now binds up our wounds by cementing another. But while these vicissitudes occur, let us remember that the transition from the character of a dutiful son to that of a kind and affectionate husband is natural and easy, and that he that fills up one station in life with credit and honour is thereby prepared for all those that follow.—(*Bush*).

Isaac was a lovely and contemplative man, and needed marriage to draw him from his habits as a recluse and to prepare him for the place he was to take in the history of the Church.

As Isaac was introduced to Rebekah by his faithful servant, so was Jesus introduced to the Church, as His bride, by John the Baptist,—the friend of the Bridegroom.

CHAPTER XXV.

Critical Notes.—1. Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. "Keturah is called a concubine in 1 Chron. i. 32. It is usually assumed, but merely on the assumption of the history following in chronological sequences, that Abraham espoused Keturah after Sarah's death. And the words '*Then again*' of the A.V. leave this impression on the English reader. But there is nothing in the original to bear this out. The literal sense is, '*And Abraham added and took a wife.*' *i.e.*, took another wife besides Sarah: but *when* is not said. Indeed, from verse 6, which says that he sent away the sons of his concubines during his lifetime, it would be most improbable that they should all have been born after Sarah's death." *(Alford.)* Murphy and others hold that Abraham took this wife after the death of Sarah. "These sons were in any case born after the birth of Isaac, and therefore after Abraham was renewed in vital powers. If this renewal of vigour remained after the birth of Isaac, it may have continued some time after the death of Sarah, whom he survived thirty-eight years. His abstinence from any concubine until Sarah gave him Hagar is against his taking any other during Sarah's lifetime."—**2. Shuah.]** The tribe to which Bildad, Job's friend, belonged. (Job viii. 1.)—**3. Sheba.]** These were probably the Sabeans who plundered Job. (Job i. 5.)—**6. Eastward, unto the east country.]** Arabia, which was east of Beersheba, in the south of Palestine, where Abraham dwelt.—**8. Gave up the ghost, and died.]** "The two verbs are identical in meaning: the repetition belongs to the solemnity of the narrative." *(Alford.)* *In a good old age.* Not as to length of years, but in the sense of a happy old age, being blessed both outwardly and inwardly. *Full of years.* The Heb. has merely "full." The meaning is that he was satisfied with his experience of life, and ready to depart. *Was gathered to his people* "This does not relate to burial, for this was not so: Abraham's "people" dwelt at this time in Haran, and he was buried at Hebron. Besides which, the fact of burial is here, and in many other places, specified over and above. (Gen. xv. 15, xxxv. 29; 1 Kings ii. 10, xi. 43.) Nor is it a mere synonym for dying: for in many places, as here, it is specified over and above the fact, here repeatedly expressed, of death. (Verse 17; Gen. xxxv. 29, xlix. 33; Num. xx. 26; Deut. xxxii. 50.) The only assignable sense, therefore, is that of reference to a state of further personal existence beyond death; and the expression thus forms a remarkable testimony to the O.T. belief in a future state." (*Alford.*)—**12 These are the generations.]** Forms the eighth document so commencing.—**16. By their towns, and by their castles.]** "The former are unwalled collections of houses or perhaps tents; the latter fortified keeps or encampments." (*Murphy.*) *Kalish* renders the clause, "By their villages and by their tents." The Arabs are divided into two classes, the wandering Bedouins, living in tents; and those who dwell in towns and villages.—**17. The years of the life of Ishmael; an hundred and thirty and seven years; and he gave up the ghost and died, and was gathered unto his people.]** Ishmael's death is here recorded by anticipation. It happened forty-eight years after Abraham's death, and when Isaac was one hundred and twenty-three years old.—**18. He died in the presence of all his brethren]** Heb. *He fell*, or, *it fell to him*. The meaning seems to be, *he had settled down*, or, *fallen into the lot of his inheritance*, according to the prediction. (Gen. xvi. 12.) He was unsubjugated by his brethren though dwelling beside them.—**19. These are the generations.]** The ninth document here begins with the usual phrase, and continues to the end of the thirty-fifth chapter. It contains the history of the second of the three patriarchs, or rather indeed, as the opening phrase intimates, of the generations of Isaac, that is, of his son Jacob." (*Murphy.*)—**21. And Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren.]** This barrenness lasted twenty years, as may be inferred from ver. 26. *For his wife.* Lit. *before his wife*, it is the same term as occurs in ch. xxx. 38, where Jacob laid the rods before, *i.e.* in front of, the flocks. But there can be no doubt here that the word has the force of *for* or *in behalf of:* acquiring this meaning through that of "having reference to," "in regard of." (*Alford.*) "The term means *before*, *opposite to*, his wife, which *Luther* understands as referring to his intent desire for his object; having nothing in his eye but this." (*Jacobus.*)—**22. And she went to inquire of the Lord.]** Kalisch interprets this of her having recourse to God's prophet, Abraham, who still survived. Knobel and Keil understand that she went to some place where Jehovah was adored, and where priests were wont to give responses in His name. But there is no sufficient evidence for either of these opinions, and it seems more likely to suppose that she inquired of the Lord directly in the way of immediate prayer.—**23. Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels: and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.]** This response is in the form of poetical parallelism. The two nations were the Edomites and the Israelites. Their hostility commenced at the time of the Exodus, at the very beginning of their national existence. The Israelites in the end subjected the Edomites.—**25. Esau.]** Signifies *hairy*. Some understand the word to be derived from a verb meaning done, or finished, and therefore describing one who was prematurely developed.—**26. Jacob.]** This name means *he shall hold the heel.* (Hos. xii. 4.) Hence the other meaning follows: to grasp the heel as in wrestling, so as to trip one up—*the supplanter.* (Gen. xxvii. 36.) The boys were born fifteen years before Abraham's death.—**27. A cunning hunter, a man of the field.]** Takes to the field for his occupation, is cunning at catching game, and brave in facing danger. The general idea is, that he was to be a man of wild and lawless habits. *Jacob was a plain man.* Heb. a *perfect, blameless man.* The same word which is elsewhere applied to a God-fearing character. His gentleness is set over against Esau's fierce disposition. *Dwelling in tents.* Their different habits also indicate a difference of disposition. Jacob was a homely, an orderly, and contented man. Esau was an *out of doors* man, not caring for social pleasures.—**29. Sod pottage.]** "That is, *seethed or boiled—a soup* This pottage is a very common dish in that country. It is made up of different grain or lentiles, bruised and boiled as a broth. There was a red pottage, made chiefly of a red grain." (*Jacobus.*)—**30. Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage.]** The words run in the Hebrew, "*Give me to eat, I pray thee, of the red, the red, the this.*" In the weakness and impatience of his hunger, he omits the name and merely describes the dish by its outward appearance. Edom, meaning *red*, was given to him as a name from this incident. At least, that name might from hence be confirmed which was first given to him on account of the complexion of his hairy skin. "Therefore was his name called Edom.—**32. Behold I am at the point to die.]** "This may be understood in three ways: the words may have (1) a general meaning—I care only for the present: I shall die, and the birthright will pass on and be of no use to *me;* (2) a particular one, referring to his way of life—I am meeting death every day in the field, and am not the man to benefit by the birthright, constantly exposed as I am to the risk of life; or (3) one belonging to the occasion then present;—"I am ready to die of faintness and fatigue, and so hold a present meal of more value than a distant contingency" Of these the A.V. by rendering, "I am at the point to die," chooses the third." (*Alford.*)—**34. Bread and pottage of lentiles.]** Heb. "Food, even pottage of lentiles."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—6.

THE LAST YEARS OF ABRAHAM.

Abraham's eventful life was now drawing towards its close. The former part of it is described with much detail, as it was necessary to show how the Church took its beginning and how carefully it was separated from the world. The line of history on which the Messiah was at length to appear had also to be clearly laid down. The proportions of this history are regulated by God's redeeming purpose. In this chapter. the remaining portion of the life of Abraham is described with great brevity. The events of many years are crowded into a few sentences. The last years of Abraham, as their story is told here, may be considered from two points of view.

I. On their natural side. We may consider Abraham simply as an ordinary member of the human race, who by a life of moral purity had preserved his health and was spared to old age. His old age, we find, was marked by *great natural vigour.* It is true, that when, in the words of the Apostle, "he was as good as dead" his strength was miraculously renewed so that he became the natural fountain of life to the chosen family. But that, we find, was not a transient gift. This renewed strength was continued to him to the end. We have a proof of this in the fact that he contracts a second marriage, and begets a numerous offspring (verses 1–4.) As a proof also of the energy of health that remained in him we find that he had power to recover his feelings after the shock of Sarah's death. His natural strength triumphed over the prostration caused by his great grief. Abraham had also full energy for the business of life. We find him active to the last in the management of all his concerns. He arranges the portions of his children, giving all his principal property to Isaac, and unto the sons of the concubines gifts. Thus he was able to arrange his family affairs before his death. All this is the picture of a hale old man whose mind and faculty remain clear and strong to the last. But the latter years of Abraham may also be considered:—

II. On their Spiritual side. We are here dealing not merely with the life of a *man*, but also of a *saint*. And all the way through his life, since God first called him, Abraham appears as a saint. He had the glory of God and His covenant purposes ever in view. By these he regulated his disposal of family matters. Therefore he "gave all he had unto Isaac," but only "gifts" to the sons of the concubines. For Isaac was the Covenant child in whom his seed should be called. He never forgot the relation of this line to God's redemptive purposes. The will of God had been clearly made known to him in this matter, and he carried out the purposes of that will with devotion and a strong sense of duty. It was in this spirit that *he provided for the purity and peace of the chosen family.* As to the sons of the concubines, "he sent them away from Isaac his son." He did this (1), to prevent confusion of race. He would prevent intermarriages, and thus preserve the stream pure along which God had determined the life of the chosen nation should flow; (2) to avoid disturbance and quarrels. He took every possible care to preserve peace. "The particulars of Abraham's final settlement of his affairs are not here detailed. The Divine decree constituted Isaac his principal heir, but the other parties having claims upon him were by no means overlooked. The patriarch was careful, not only to make suitable provision for them during his own lifetime, but also to leave such instructions as might prevent uncertain disputes and heart-burnings after he was gone. Thus the patriarch passed the latter stage of his troubled journey—in privacy, apparently, and in peace, waiting till his change came."—(*Candlish*).

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. It was after Sarah was dead, and Rebekah had come to occupy her vacant tent, that Abraham lawfully, and for Godly ends, entered into a second matrimonial alliance. It would appear, indeed, that this marriage stood, in some respects, on a somewhat different footing from the first. At the sixth verse, Keturah, as well as Hagar, is referred to as Abraham's concubine. But that name is certainly intended here, as well as elsewhere, according to the customs of these early times, to intimate merely inferiority of rank or condition on the part of the wife, in respect of her having been one of her husband's household;—without necessarily denoting any irregularity, in the nature of the connection itself. —(*Candlish*).

Abraham may have taken this step because he was a lonely man, on the death of Sarah; and especially now that Isaac was married, and therefore separated from him.

There is no stain cleaving to this second marriage. Even the relation to Keturah promotes, in its measure, the divine scheme of blessing, for the new life which came upon the old exhausted nature and strength of Abraham, and the word of promise, which destined him to be the father of a mass of nations, authenticates itself in this second marriage.—(*Delitzsch*).

We remark here the arising of new hopes in the declining years of Abraham. Sarah is dead; and when Abraham bowed himself before the sons of Heth his heart seemed buried in Sarah's grave. Isaac was married, and all Abraham's care seemed to centre in him. Yet here we find Abraham contracting a new alliance, busied about life, entering with energy into a fresh sphere of duties. We collect from that the imperishable nature of hope. No *natural* sorrow is eternal. When Paul and Barnabas parted, one would have thought that their hearts so violently torn asunder would have been long ere they had healed, but soon we find each twining round a new friend with as much warmth of affection as before. Out of the grave fresh hopes bloom; for our affections are not meant to rest in their objects, but to pass on from one thing to another. They are prospective. They exist here in training for nobler uses. They are perennial, and unless exhausted by misuse grow fresher and stronger to rest on God at last.—(*Robertson*).

Verses 2-4. The Abrahamites in the wider sense, who partially peopled Arabia, must form the broad basis for the theocratic faith of Abraham, and become a bridge between Judaism and Christianity on the one hand, and heathenism on the other.—(*Lange*).

In order that literally as well as spiritually the promise might be fulfilled, he became, by Keturah, "the father of many nations" after the flesh;—even as in Isaac, and his seed through Isaac,—the seed which is, "not many, but one, that is Christ" (Gal. iii. 26),—he was destined to be the "father of many nations" by faith;—the father of the innumerable company, "out of all kindreds, and peoples, and nations, and tongues"—all of whom through faith are the children of faithful Abraham.—(*Candlish*).

Verse 5. Abraham established the right of primogeniture. He gives all that he had unto Isaac, gifts only to the rest. Two nations only among the ancients kept up the notions of family, the Romans and the Jews. In all other nations a man rested on his own title to consideration, on his own merits. In these two a man gathered family associations and national ones, as his race went on. The Jews said, we are Abraham's seed, descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and there was an advantage in their feeling children of this long ancestry, because those who have a great past get out of self. They are pledged not to dishonour their ancestors. Many, by the mere stirring of such a memory are dignified. They who have no past have a certain vulgarity; or uneasiness, or else personal pride differs from the dignity which knows whence it comes. And this, in a way is the Christian's advantage. We have a past. We stand upon a past; it is a righteousness not our own which has shed its lustre upon us. We do not make our own destiny or heaven. These are gifts given us, advantages and privileges, but we have no merit in possessing them. Hence the Christian's sense of dignity is humble, for it is not personal but derived.—(*Robertson*).

Verse 6. He gives portions to the sons of the concubines during his lifetime, and sends them away to the East. Ishmael had been portioned off long before. (Gen. xxi. 14.) The East is a general name for Arabia, which stretched away to the south-east, and east of the point where Abraham resided in the south of Palestine. The northern part of Arabia, which lay due east of Palestine, was formerly more fertile and populous than now. The sons of Keturah were probably dismissed before they had any children. Their notable descendants, according to custom, are added here before they are dismissed from the main line of the narrative.—(*Murphy.*)

Abraham is the man of faith all the way through. In the disposal of his family he has an eye to the prosperity of the Church of God.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7-11.

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF ABRAHAM.

I.—His death. 1 *It was the peaceful close of a long life.* "An hundred threescore and fifteen years" were "the days of the years" of Abraham's life. It was a life which had not attained to the days of the years of the life of his father, still it was one of great length. His life's mortal day was tranquil at the close. "He gave up the ghost and died." Such is the simple account of the sacred historian, suggesting to us that it was not by a sudden shock, or by sharp disease, but by slow natural decay that Abraham drew to his end. His long life was according to God's promise made to him many years ago, "Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace: thou shalt be buried in a good old age." 2. *It was the close of a satisfied life.* He died "an old man, and full." Not simply full of years, but satisfied with his experience of this life. Life is not only a length which is measured by the course of years, but it is also a *capacity* which is to be filled up. It is what we think, enjoy, and feel that makes life rich, and not the mere length of time during which we have lived. The full life is to be satisfied with the loving favour of God. 3. *It was an introduction to a new and better life.* "He was gathered unto his people." This expression is distinguished from departing this life, and also from being buried. His fathers had died, but they were not then dead. Their souls were still living. He was about to join that assembly of departed spirits. The first step in the history of the body after death is burial, but the first step in the history of the soul is its introduction to the companionship of those who have passed through death into the invisible world. Thus do these words speak to us of immortality: the faith of the patriarchs could not be satisfied with the short span of life allotted to man on earth. It looked for an eternal life.

II. His burial. 1. *It was an honourable one.* He was buried in a family sepulchre which was purchased for a large sum of money. His vast possessions, his venerable age, and noble character would cause him to be held in great estimation of all the people. They would bring their honour and veneration to the newly-opened grave of such a man. High in the admiration of all who knew him, Abraham had such a burial as can only be accorded to a great and good man. 2. *It was an occasion for peace among the members of his family.* "His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him." Whatever enmities were between these brothers, these were silenced in the presence of death. They met together at the grave of their father to render him the last offices of filial affection. Thus death brings together those who will not associate as friends, at other times, and will bring us all together sooner or later. 3. *It was the occasion of further blessing to the living.* "After the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac." Abraham was dead, but God was still carrying on His work. Individuals perish from amongst men, but God was still accomplishing His purposes throughout the ages of human history. When one good man dies, the blessing of God departs not, but rests upon those who are left behind. They inherit the promises made to the great and good who are gone, and the precious memories of their sainted lives. And the very place where Isaac dwelt reminded him of the Divine source from whence he was to expect every blessing. **It was** *Lahai-roi*, which means *the well of the Living One who seeth me.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 7. His years were an hundred and seventy-five. He survived Sarah thirty-eight years, and Isaac's marriage thirty-five. His grandfather lived a hundred and forty-eight years, his father two hundred and five, his son Isaac a hundred and eighty, and his grandson Jacob a hundred and forty-seven; so that his years were the full average of that period.—(*Murphy*).

The days of the years. A peculiar and impressive mode of computing time, as if intended to intimate that we are creatures of a day, whose life is to be reckoned rather by "the inch of days than the ell of years." Thus died this venerable patriarch, the father of the faithful, after having sojourned as a stranger and pilgrim in the land of promise one hundred years. His life, though shorter by far than that of his illustrious predecessors, was yet much fuller of incidents and events. The event of his decease is but briefly related. Most instructive would it have been to have stood in imagination by the side of his dying bed, and to have heard his assurances of the mercy and faithfulness of Him in whom he had believed, and who had led him through the mazes of so long a pilgrimage. Nothing of this, however, has been vouchsafed to us, and, except for the purpose of our gratification, nothing more of it was needed. After such a life of faith and piety, there is little need of inquiring into the manner of his death; we know that it could not have been otherwise than full of peace and hope. From the earthly, he no doubt looked believingly forward to the heavenly Canaan, the land of immortal rest, and thither, after a long and honourable course below, we have every assurance that he was graciously received. (Luke, xvi. 22).—(*Bush*).

The years of human life come to a matter of days at the last.

Let us hastily recapitulate his history, so chequered by vicissitudes. He began his wanderings at Chanan; then seeking a new country, he entered Canaan, feeding his flocks there as long as pasture lasted, and then passed on. After that we find him still a wanderer, driven by famine to Egypt; then returning home, parting with Lot, losing his best friend, commanded to give up the dearest object of his heart, and at the close of life startled almost to find that he had not a foot of earth in which to make for his wife a grave. Thus throughout his life he was a pilgrim. In all we see God's blessed principle of illusion by which He draws us on towards Himself. The object of our hope seems just before us, but we go on without attaining it; all appears failure, yet all this time we are advancing surely on our journey and find our hopes realised not here but in the kingdom beyond. Abraham learnt thus the infinite nature of duty, and this is what a Christian must always feel. He must never think that he can do all he ought to do. It is possible for the child to do each day all that is required of him; but the more we receive of the spirit of Christ, the larger, the more infinitely impossible of fulfilment will our circle of duties become.—(*Robertson*).

Verse 8. We also observe this in Abraham, that he was not a hero but a saint. There have been three ages of the world. 1. That in which power was admired, when strength, personal prowess, was the highest virtue; then God was described as a "man of war." 2. That in which wisdom was reverenced. Then we have Solomon the wise, instead of Saul the strong; and then the wisdom of God is felt to be in contrivance, rather than in power. 3. That in which goodness was counted best. Then God and nature were felt to be on the side of right, and virtue was counted better than wisdom, that is the age in which Christianity can begin, the fulness of times is come. And it is three such seasons that we personally go through. In boyhood we reverence strength; in youth, intellect; in riper years, the milder graces of the heart. Now what is remarkable is, that Israel began with, not a hero, nor a wise man, but a saint. Abraham is not the warrior, nor the sage, but the father of the faithful. Hence the perennial progressive character of the Jewish religion. It is not a thing that can come to an end. Abraham, the man of faith, is the forerunner of the Lord of Love.—(*Robertson*).

Full of days. The Heb. has simply "full." Our translators have supplied the word "years." The Targ. Jon. renders it, "saturated with all good." The previous expressions would seem sufficient to denote the fact of his longevity, the present we think to be better understood of his having had in every respect a satisfying experience of life; he had known both its good and its evil, its bitter and its sweet, and he now desired to live no longer; he was ready and anxious to depart. It seems to be a metaphor taken from a guest regaled by a plentiful banquet, who rises from the table satisfied and full. Thus Seneca, remarking in one of his Epistles that he had lived long enough, says, *Mortem plenus expecto*, "fully satisfied, I wait for death."—(*Bush*).

Mere length of days cannot give a man Divine wisdom. Age has only a real value when it is dignified by piety, and strong in the hope of immortality. What has time done for that man who has come to hoary hairs, and yet has not learned wisdom, which is the knowledge of what is the true end of life! The lapse of years, to eat, to drink, to sleep, to pace the weary round of habit and of mortal labours, is not *life*. Life must be measured—as geometricians would say of solid bodies—in three dimensions. It must enclose some substantial good. Life has a capacity which must be filled with knowledge, truth, and love. Every day is a measure which we should fill up with holy feelings and deeds. Our true worth before God depends upon what we have filled our lives with. By our spiritual diligence we become "rich towards God," and not by any claim derived from the honours of age. The true age of the soul must not be reckoned by time, but by the books we have read, the agreeable objects we have seen, the sublime impressions we have derived from the grand works of nature around us or from this scene of man, and the spiritual thoughts and joys which have stirred our heart.

> "Life's more than breath and the quick round of blood;
> 'Tis a great spirit and a busy heart.
> We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
> In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
> We should count time by heart-throbs.
> He most lives, who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best."—(*Festus.*)

Thus there is in man's life a certain capacity into which a great mass of thought and feeling may be compressed. The study of a single science may be said to prolong our existence—or, to speak more correctly—to deepen and widen it; for we become conscious of a thousand pleasant thoughts, while slow and indolent minds who only measure life by our clock time are conscious of only one. The ingenuity of the human mind has invented devices which can economise power, so that we can press matter of greater density into the capacity of life. La Place has said that "the invention of logarithms has lengthened the life of the astronomer." In like manner, spiritual life depends upon the wealth a man has in him, and not upon the question of years. Elihu, who stands up as a spokesman on behalf of God in his disputation with Job, tells us how that one inexperienced youth having the Spirit is wiser than the most venerable age without the teaching of that Spirit. (Job xxxiii. 7–9).

"He was satisfied with length of days, for his eyes had seen the salvation of God." (Psa. xci. 16). He had experienced enough of the Lord's loving kindness in the land of the living. For it is not by the common and ordinary measures of the successive seasons as they roll on, that this fulness of years in a spiritual point of view, is to be estimated;—nor even by those public and domestic events which men often set up as landmarks beside the stream of time, or the beaten path of life;—but by what the faithful and patient pilgrim has seen of the salvation of God, and what he has tasted of the Divine goodness on the earth. Is he full? Is the pilgrim satisfied? Is he ready to depart? It is not because he can reckon some threescore and ten revolutions of the sun; or it may be fourscore; or even like Abraham, "an hundred, threescore, and fifteen." Nor is it because he can say of the various sources of interest and pleasure upon earth,—I have drunk of them all. But it is because he has eaten of the bread of heaven and drawn water out of the wells of salvation; because he has been partaker of the unsearchable riches of Christ. He has lived long in the earth—his days may have been many in the land;—not in proportion to the anniversaries of his birth which he has celebrated, but in proportion to the tokens of Divine love that he has received, the gracious dealings of God with his soul that he has noted, and the wonders of grace and mercy that he has witnessed in the church of the redeemed,—does the believer reckon himself to have lived long on the earth! This, and this alone, is the godly man's real test or criterion;—this is his scriptural and spiritual standard of old age,—his scriptural and spiritual measure of "length of days."—(*Candlish*).

To be gathered is not to cease to exist, but to continue existing in another sphere. His peoples, the departed families, from whom he is descended, are still in being in another not less real world. This, and the like expression in the passage quoted, give the first fact in the history of the soul after death, as the burial is the first step in that of the body.—(*Murphy*).

Verses 9, 10. Thus his body took possession of the Promised Land, as his soul went to take possession of that heavenly land which Canaan typified.

At the grave of Abraham,—1. Ishmael appears in a favourable light. He shows filial affection, an interest in the destiny of his family, submission to that Almighty power which is above all. 2. Enmities are buried. Disputes are now forgotten before this opened grave. Hope is gathered for the future. Ishmael could not but wish that the blessings of his father might fall upon him. He was shut out from many favours of the Covenant; still he too was God's creature, and there were reserves of blessing even for him.

Isaac and Ishmael in brotherly cooperation. Ishmael was the eldest son, dwelt in the presence of all his brethren, and had a special blessing. The sons of Keturah were far away in the East; very young, and had no particular blessing. Ishmael is therefore properly associated with Isaac in paying the last offices to their deceased father. The burying place had been prepared before. The purchase is here rehearsed with great precision as a testimony of the fact. This burial ground is an earnest of the promised possession.—(*Murphy*).

Abraham, therefore, in purchasing a grave for Sarah was merely providing a final resting place for himself. How certain, and often how sudden, the transition from the funeral rites, we prepare for others to those which others prepare for us! Were we to leave out of view the spiritual and eternal blessings confered upon Abraham, how humble would be the conclusion of so grand a career. Vision upon vision, covenant upon covenant, promise upon promise, conducting only to a little cave in Hebron! But from the Divine declaration uttered three hundred and thirty years after this event, "I am the God of Abraham," it appears that his relation to God was as entire at that time as at any former period in his whole life. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living;" and the faithful of all past ages live with God, and their dust is precious in His eyes, in whatever cavern of the earth, or recess of the ocean it may be deposited. Isaac and Ishmael were now present at the burial of their father. Though previously at variance, they now unite in sympathetic sorrow at the grave of Abraham. The latter must have been "a wild man" indeed not to have been tamed at least into a temporary tenderness by such an event. A wise Providence often works a forgetfulness of past resentments by the common calamities visited upon families and kindred. They tend to reconcile the alienated, to extinguish bitterness and strife, to rekindle the dying embers of filial duty and brotherly love. Isaac and Ishmael, men of different natures, of opposite interests, rivals from the womb, forget all animosity, and mingle tears over a father's tomb. Let the lesson thus afforded be carefully learned by all who bear the paternal relation, and let them be admonished to go and do likewise.—(*Bush*).

Verse 11. The death of God's saint's does not interrupt the flow of His mercy towards those who are left behind in the world.

It was necessary in those countries to fix their residence by a well, and it is no less necessary, if we wish to live, that we fix ours near to the ordinances of God. The well where Isaac pitched his tent was distinguished by two interesting events;—1. The merciful appearance of God to Hagar, from whence it received its name; *the well of Him that liveth and seeth me.* Hagar or Ishmael, methinks, should have pitched a tent there, that it might have been to them a memorial of past mercies: but if they neglect it, Isaac will occupy it. The gracious appearance of God in a place, endears it to him, let it have been to whom it may.—2. It was the place from the way of which he first met his beloved Rebekah; there therefore they continue to dwell together.—(*Fuller*).

This verse is an appendix to the history of Abraham, stating that the blessing of God which he had enjoyed till his death, now descended upon his son Isaac who abode at Beer Lahai-roi. The general name God is here employed because the blessing of God denotes the material and temporal prosperity which had attended Abraham in comparison with other men of his day. Of the spiritual and eternal blessings connected with Jehovah, the proper name of the author of being and blessing, we shall hear in due time.—(*Murphy*).

THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF ABRAHAM.

The notice of the death of a distinguished man is usually regarded as incomplete without at least an attempt to analyse and sum up his history, as well as to delineate his character.

The recorded life of the patriarch might almost seem to be left to the church as an exercise and trial of the very faith upon which he himself was called to act. In every view he is a test as well as an example of believing loyalty to God. The outward aspect of his course is exhibited in a few of its most striking particulars, but we have no key, or scarcely any, to the inward interpretation of it. We have little or no insight into his private and personal experience. There is no access behind the scenes; no unfolding of those hidden movements of soul which have their external types, and nothing more, in the vicissitudes of a strangely chequered history. But we have a *general principle* under which the whole is to be classed. Abraham lived and walked by *faith*. We should endeavour to trace the workings of that believing reliance upon God which furnishes the solution and explanation of his history. The eras of his history may be classed under two comprehensive heads,—the one reaching from his first call to the remarkable crisis of his full and formal justification (Ch. xi. 27; xv. 21); and the other from his unsteadfastness in the matter of Hagar to the final trial and triumph of his faith in the sacrifice first, and then in the marriage of his son Isaac (Chap. xvi. 1,–xxiv. 67). During the first of these periods, his faith is chiefly exercised upon the bare promise itself made to him by God. During the second, it has to do mainly with the manner in which the promise is to be fulfilled.

The First Period.

This consists of an almost dramatic series of events,—beginning with a very humble and commonplace transaction, but ending in what elevates the patriarch to a high rank in the sight both of God and man.

I. **Abraham comes before us as an emigrant.** But he is an emigrant, not of his own accord, but at the call and command of God (Chap. xi. 31, xii. 5). The first stage from Ur to Haran is accomplished without a breach in the family. But at Haran the oldest member of the company is cut off, for "Terah died in Haran." Why should the very commencement of Abraham's movement be so ordered as to imply that he must leave his father's bones to rest,—neither in the place from which he goes, nor in the place which God has promised to him,—but as it were by the wayside, on the very outset of his pilgrimage? Surely it is not for nothing that he is appointed to set up as his first milestone his parents' tomb. It is an emphatic initiation into his calling as destined henceforth to be a stranger on the earth.

II. **Abraham comes before us as a stranger.** We find him entering Canaan, and beginning his migratory sojourn in that country (Chap. xii. 6; xiii. 4). It is not an ordinary movement or transition from one settled habitation to another. The peculiarity here is that the emigrant arrives at the place of his destination, and finds it a place of wandering still. He is warned, the very instant he sets his foot in the land, that he is to have but a wayfarer's passing use of its accommodation, although ultimately, in connection with it, a rich inheritance awaits him. A partial famine in Canaan is appointed that he may be driven down into Egypt;—that perpetual type of estrangement and bondage, from whence it is a standing rule of the Divine procedure that all the Lord's chosen ones shall experience a signal deliverance,—as it is written, "Out of Egypt have I called my Son." (Chap. xii. 10–20; Matt. ii. 13). Nor is it wonderful that in such circumstances the incidental failure as well as the habitual firmness of his holy trust in God should be made manifested. Wherever he went Abraham "built an altar unto the Lord." (Chap. xii. 7, 8; xiii. 4). Everywhere and always he openly observed the worship of the true God, to whatever misunderstanding or persecution it might expose him, in a land in which his God, as well as himself, was a stranger. The transaction in Egypt was the one blot which disfigures the picture. We can understand and feel how that faith which could thus ordinarily sustain unshaken so frail and fallible a man, must have been beyond any exercise of mere human resolution, and how truly it may be said to have been "the gift of God."

III. **Abraham comes before us in an aspect of bright moral beauty.** (Chap. xiii. 5–18). Never does Abraham appear in a more attractive light than in his courteous and kindly dealing with his kinsman Lot. The wisdom of his attempt to allay domestic strife by the proposal of an amicable separation, is cleared from every suspicion of a sinister or selfish policy, by the admirable disinterestedness with which Abraham leaves the choice of the whole land to Lot, and the cheerfulness with which he acquiesces in Lot's preference of the better portion. In a worldly point of view, it was no inconsiderable sacrifice that Abraham made. When we find him frankly consenting to his kinsman's evident desire to found a colony for himself,—nay more, willingly surrendering to him the choicest vales of which the country could boast, and retaining only the ruder and wider outfields as his own,—we may well admire the generosity and self-denial of this entire transaction. And we may well trace these noble qualities to no ordinary motive of mere human virtue, but to that Divine grace which alone enabled Abraham, as a stranger and pilgrim on the earth, to sit loose to the attractions of earthly possessions and earthly privileges, and to have his treasure and his heart alike in heaven. (Matt. vi. 21). This instance of heavenly-mindedness is owned and blessed of God at the time. For no sooner does Abraham manifest his willingness to forego present good for the sake of peace, and out of the confidence he has in God, than he reaps a present reward. The Lord graciously renews to him, and in more emphatic and explicit terms than ever before, the promise of an inheritance for himself and for his seed;—"And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, lift up now thine eyes" etc. etc. (Chap. xiii. 14–17). Thus by the example of His gracious dealing with Abraham, the Lord ratifies the assurance which His believing people in all ages may have, that they shall fare none the worse, either in this world or in the next, for any sacrifices they may make or any sufferings they may endure. (1, Tim. iv. 8; Luke xviii. 29, 30).

IV. **A more open and signal evidence of the Divine countenance awaits the patriarch.** The plot of that moral drama which opens with Abraham's offer and Lot's choice very speedily developes itself. The war of the kings (Chap. xiv.) is a striking commentary on the previous narrative. The plain where Lot settles, watered by the Jordan, sheltered by sunny hills on either side, and basking in the full smiles of a most genial clime, has become populous and rich. The highest cultivation has clothed the fields with luxuriant fruitfulness; cities of no mean name crown the heights along the banks of the river; and the valley has proverbially got the name of the "garden of the Lord." But the moral does not keep pace with the material improvement of the land. Unheard of profligacy characterises their manners. Crime and effeminacy are in the ascendant. (Chap. xiii. 13). Thus the country of Lot's choice presented a tempting object to the cupidity of the surrounding tribes, while the slothful and sensual corruption of its inhabitants seemed to expose them as an easy prey to their less civilised, perhaps, but more hardy neighbours. A war of petty principalities broke out. A few chieftains, allured by the riches and encouraged by the luxury of the far-famed cities of the plain, made a predatory incursion into the territories where Lot had fixed his home, defeated the native chiefs in a pitched battle, and swept away the persons and the property of the vanquished, in the indiscriminate plunder of a successful fray. That Lot and his household should suffer in the turmoil, was but too natural a result of his covetousness in grasping at a share of the prosperity of the wicked. And it might have seemed no more than just that he should be left to reap the fruits of his own sin and folly. But the instant he hears of his nephew's calamity; he rushes to the rescue. Forgetful of all past unkindness, unmoved by Lot's undutiful and unworthy preference of his own interests to those of his benefactor and friend, Abraham thinks only of the plight into which his brother's son had fallen. Collecting the members of his numerous and well-ordered household, he suddenly organises a powerful army, places himself as a general for the emergency at their head, pursues the triumphant host, and recovers the spoil. It is a noble retaliation and reply on the part of Abraham to Lot's selfish want of consideration. It is a glorious revenge. It is truly "heaping coals of fire upon his head." But the transaction has a further meaning, as an instance and example of Abraham's faith. Not only is it an illustration of the generosity of his character, but also of his deep spiritual insight into the promises of which he was the heir. For (1), his right to take up arms, even in defence of his kinsman, depended upon his possessing a sovereign authority in the land. There is deliberation and dignity about this whole adventure, as far as Abraham is concerned. His is the port of royalty. For once he asserts the prerogative which consciously belongs to him. He interposes as ruler and owner of the promised inheritance. And (2), how anxious he is, while declining any recompense that might stamp his enterprise with the least taint of a mercenary motive (Chap. xiv. 22–24), to render at the same time most marked and studious homage, and that of a religious kind, to one mysteriously bearing the joint offices of king and priest, and the joint appellations of righteousness and peace. (Verse 18–20). For we cannot fail to see, especially with the light which the apostolic commentary sheds upon it, (Heb. vii), how strong must have been the patriarch's faith, at once in the promised inheritance and in the promised Saviour. It was faith which moved Abraham to assure so strangely the unwonted character of a prince entitled to levy war. It was faith which also led him to give so remarkable and unequivocal an expression of his willing subjection to the illustrious Being whom Melchisedec prefigured;—and to whom, as "priest upon His throne," all the spiritual seed of Abraham are ever willing to give the undivided glory of every victory achieved by them, or for them, over those enemies who would be spoilers of the spiritual heritage which God has in the families that call upon His name.

V. Consider Abraham in his private communion with God. In the case of Abraham, great in the contrast between his public and his private life. On the one side you see a brave general, at the head of a conquering army, and playing a right royal part among this world's potentates and princes. On the other hand, you seem to see a moping and melancholy recluse, idly wandering alone at midnight, a star-gazer, a dreamer, imagining ideal glories in some visionary world to come. The transition is most startling, from the hostile din of tumultuous strife to the serene solitude of a colloquy with God beneath the silent eloquence of the starry heavens! But Abraham is at home in either scene. The object of his one singular and abrupt appearance on the stage of public affairs being attained, and his right as the royal heir of the land being once for all asserted, he retires again into the seclusion which as a pilgrim he prefers. And he gives his undivided care to the carrying forward of the Divine purposes. But Abraham is found in secret communion with God as to certain thoughts which vex him in connection with the promised blessing. He complains not unnaturally of his still desolate condition as regards the future. (Chap. xv. 2, 3). And the complaint is wonderfully and graciously met in that transaction under the midnight starry sky, on which, all throughout scripture, the assurance of Abraham's acceptance, as justified by faith, is made to turn. (Chap. xv. 4–6). It is the hour of universal slumber. But near that silent tent two figures are to be seen; the one like unto the Son of God—the other a venerable form bending low in adoration of his Divine companion. And as we listen and overhear the strange colloquy that ensues,—in which apart altogether from any corroborative sign on which he might lean, the patriarch simply believes the Divine assurance, that childless and aged as he is, a progeny as numerous as the stars awaits him,—we cannot but own that it is indeed a mere and simple exercise of faith alone, without works or services of any kind whatever, that is the instrument of his salvation, and the means of his finding favour with God. And we cannot but acquiesce in the Divine testimony respecting his justification, —so frequently repeated with reference to this single and solitary incident in this history :—"Abraham believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." (Chap. xv. 6; Rom. iv. 3, 9, 22; Gal. iii. 6). But though faith alone is the "hand" by which Abraham on this occasion appropriates the justifying righteousness pledged to him, it is not a faith that is content indolently to acquiesce in the darkness of entire ignorance respecting the ways of that God upon whose mere word it so implicitly relies. The patriarch follows up his believing submission with the earnest enquiry, "Lord whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" (Verse 8). And in reply, he has the covenant of his peace ratified by a very special sacrifice (Verses 9, 12, 17). And he obtains also an insight both into the future fortunes of his seed, and into the destiny awaiting himself. As to his seed, he is informed, that though the delay of four centuries is to intervene, through the long suffering of God, until "the iniquity of the Amorites is full." (Verse 16),—they are at last to possess the whole extent of the land reaching "from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." While as to himself, he is to understand that his inheritance is to be postponed to the future and eternal state, and that the utmost he has to look for in this world is a quiet departure when his pilgrimage is over. (Verse 15). Thus, justified by faith, the patriarch is made willing to subordinate all the earthly prospects of his race to the will of Him in whom he has believed; and as for himself, to live by the power of the world to come. We may look upon this midnight scene,—with the remarkable covenant transaction which closes it, unfolding to the patriarch, with a clearness and precision altogether new, the Divine purpose respecting his own and his seed's inheritance of the land,—as the climax of what we may call the first part of Abraham's walk of faith. Abraham acquiesces in the purposes of God with unhesitating confidence, though he knows not how it is possible, old and childless as he is, to have them ever brought to pass and made good.

THE SECOND PERIOD.

Abraham has shown how unreservedly he can give credit to God for the fulfilment of His mere word, however incredible it might seem to the eye of sense. Will he also and equally give credit to God for the fulfilment of it in his own way?

I. **In this new trial, the patriarch's faith appears at first to fail.** He is waiting for some step to be taken with a view to his having that heir "out of his own bowels," (Chap. xv. 4)—whom God has told him of. And this mere waiting becomes a sad weariness to flesh and blood. Can no expedient be adopted for giving effect to the Divine decree? To try something—to try anything—is easier than to "be still." So Abraham, growing impatient of the Lord's delay, listens to the plausible suggestions of his partner; and complying with her fond desire "to obtain children," he suffers himself to be betrayed into that sin in the matter of Hagar which brought so much domestic evil in its train. For the offence, though not in his case prompted by carnal appetite, bore nevertheless the fruit which the like offence always bears;—blunting the conscience, bardening the heart, and unfitting the whole inner man for the Divine fellowship and favour. And in the dreary blank of the long interval that elapses between the birth of Ishmael and the next recorded communication from on high,—a period of thirteen years (Chap. xvi. 16; xvii. 1), during which a dark cloud seems to rest upon the patriarch, such as nothing short of a fresh call and new revival can dispel,—we trace the miserable fruit of his backsliding. But,

II. **The manner of the patriarch's revival is eminently gracious.** (Isa. lxiv. 7, 8. Ps. cxviii. 18). First, there is a mild rebuke of his former unbelief and guile, in the announcement and invitation, "I am the Almighty God, walk before me and be thou perfect." (Chap. xvii. 1). The Almighty God. Why didst thou then distrust My ability to make good My own promise at My own time and in My own way? Why didst thou walk in the crooked path of carnal policy? Rather walk before Me. Live as in My sight, and as having all that concerns thee safe in My hands. "And be thou perfect." Stoop to no doubtful compromise or plausible proposal of human sublety and skill. With this gracious censure hinted, the interrupted intercourse on the part of God with His friend is resumed. There is a relenting tenderness in the Lord's assurance, (Chap. xvii. 2), as if He could no longer refrain from returning to visit and bless his faithful servant. Yes! In spite of all that has passed, "I will make my covenant between me and thee." It is indeed a reconciliation that may well overwhelm and overpower the receiver of so great a kindness under a sense of unutterable humiliation, gratitude, and awe;—"And Abraham fell on his face, and God talked with him." (Verse 3). The interview that follows is one of the spiritual epochs in Abraham's life. The covenant is renewed with more explicit promises than ever (Verses 3–8). The patriarch is henceforth to be known not as Abram merely, but Abraham,—not "the father of elevation," but "the father of a great multitude." And still further to confirm his faith and hope, the significant seal of the covenant, the rite of circumcision is ordained. (Verses 9–14). This whole procedure was fitted to recover Abraham out of the depths into which he had been falling, bringing him back to the safe and simple attitude of waiting patiently for the Lord's own fulfilment of His purposes.

III. The culminating point of Abraham's exaltation in connection with his conduct towards Lot. He has power as a prince to prevail with God, and affords a signal instance and evidence of the acceptableness of intercessory prayer (Chap. xviii. and xix). The particulars of this great incident give us the most elevated idea of the place Abraham has in the Divine heart. He is treated by God as His "friend." Thus the Lord visits him as a friend, and along with two attendant angels, accepts his hospitality and sits familiarly at his table (Chap. xviii. 1–8). The Lord converses with him as a friend not only of those things concerning the patriarch himself—such as the terms of the Covenant and the near approach of the time when Sarah shall have a son—but, what is a more special proof of friendship, the Lord opens up to him His purpose as governor among the nations;—as if He could not hide from Abraham what He was about to do, but must admit him to His councils, and confer with him with regard to them (Verses 16–22). Thereafter, in the unprecedented and unparalleled liberty of speech granted to the patriarch as he pleads for the doomed cities, and in assurance that what was done for the deliverance of Lot was done in remembrance of Abraham (Chap. xix. 29); we see the highest honour conferred on him of which human nature can well be considered capable.

IV. The next scene presents to us the patriarch grievously humbled. After the catastrophe of Sodom, which broke up his family, Abraham is cast abroad as a wanderer again. He is brought into fresh contact with the people and the princes from whose lawless corruption of manners he has so much to apprehend (Chap. xx. 1). The new "strength" which "through faith" Sarah is at this time receiving to "conceive seed" (Heb. xi. 11) implying probably the supernatural return of somewhat of her former attractive fairness (Chap. xii. 11)—is an additional embarrassment to the wanderer, and makes the present exposure of his family among strangers peculiarly unseasonable. In such circumstances, his old expedient unhappily suggests itself to him again (Chap. xx. 2). He is betrayed into a repetition of the mean and cowardly offence which on a former occasion not only provoked the Lord's displeasure, but dishonoured Him before the heathen. And though the same overruling hand that had brought good out of evil before, interposes now to avert the calamity, still the patriarch himself is sufficiently rebuked. (Verses 8–10). For his own name's sake, indeed, the Lord will not suffer His gracious purposes to be frustrated, as by the sinful timidity of His servant they might have been. The holy race must be beyond insult or suspicion. The manner in which Abraham and his household escape is enough to show that it is the Lord's sovereignty; and not any virtue in the creature, that secures the purity and permanence of a seed to serve Him while sun and moon endure. (Verses 11–18).

V. The actual fulfilment of the promise does not completely abolish all strife between the flesh and the spirit. We find traces of a hesitancy and halting as to the acceptance of the heir. Abraham halts between two opinions, manifesting a sort of lurking preference for "the son of the bond-woman, born after the flesh," over "the son of the free-woman, born after the spirit." (Gal. iv. 22–30). He is scarcely reconciled to the suggestion of his partner, even by the interposition of God Himself, and the repetition of the Divine decree that by this time ought to have been familiar, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." (Verse 12). But the patriarch makes a final surrender of the confidence he had been tempted to build upon his first born and now well-grown child Ishmael. It is a strong exercise of faith to which he is thus called;—such as would be needed when the Saviour of mankind lay a helpless infant in the manger, with tyrants plotting His destruction,—and when a spiritual mind must, notwithstanding, apprehend the whole weight of God's eternal purposes and man's everlasting welfare as hanging on the single and slight thread of that little child's preservation!

VI. The scene on Mount Moriah forms the climax of Abraham's walk of faith. Abraham is now required in more trying circumstances than before "against hope to believe in hope." For to believe before Isaac's birth was not really so hard a thing as to continue to believe in spite of Isaac's death. Then he had to believe before a sign was given—now, he has to believe although the sign once given is withdrawn. Before Abraham got Isaac, it was difficult for him to realise the possibility of the promise being fulfilled; and now that Isaac is to be lost to him, he might almost be expected to utter such words of melancholy despondency as fell from the lips of the two disciples journeying to Emmaus, "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." (Luke xxiv. 21).

God's people may find themselves in an hour of darkness and season of trial with no "child of promise" in their heart or life to which they may cling. The fairest and most promising evidence of grace may be giving way. Again is the believer cast back upon that simple trust in the mere word of God that sustained him at the first. Nor in such an emergency will anything suffice to uphold him but a firm reliance on the omnipotence of God. The most startling contradictions that perplex the eye of sense cannot stand in the way of His faithfulness and truth. In spite of the failure of many an Isaac, the God of grace is able to make good all that He has spoken;—not now perhaps, or even in this world, or on this side of death at all,—but at all events in that resurrection state to which, after all, faith chiefly looks. The aged believer, like Abraham, may have many a sad and searching trial, cutting off all his former experiences, and leaving him without sign. But his God and Saviour are still the same. He may still say, "I know whom I have believed."

VII. The closing incidents in Abraham's eventful life. His grief for the death and care for the burial of Sarah,—the successful plan that he adopted to secure a suitable wife for Isaac,—his own entrance a second time into the marriage state,—his becoming thus literally as well as spiritually the father of many nations,—his timely settlement of his worldly affairs,—his quiet death in a good old age,—his burial at which both his sons, Ishmael and Isaac took part;—these might well demand particular notice. But a single general remark will suffice. The quiet domestic chronicle of death and marriage comes in with a sad yet soothing charm to wind up the wanderer's agitated career. The crisis is now over, and he has a comparatively easy task to fulfil, as he calmly makes preparation for his own removal, and for the accomplishment of the Lord's will when he is gone. One feature of his faith is illustrated as his life closes in. It is the remarkable combination of the highest heavenly-mindedness with the most thorough practical wisdom in ordering his earthly concerns. On the occasion of burying Sarah, he acts as if he had no part or lot in any inheritance here below, beyond what he could claim as awaiting him and his after death. (Chap. xxiii). While again in his adoption of the most decided measures to ensure the pure transmission of the covenant promise through Isaac (Chap. xxiv), he acts as if it were in this present earthly scene that all his duty and all his interest were concentrated. The trial of Abraham's faith in the command to offer up Isaac brings out his entire willingness to have all his hopes postponed to the future state, and prepares us for the manifestation of his reverential concern respecting the dust of his beloved Sarah, and its due consignment to a tomb that he can call exclusively his own, in the midst of a country in which he is a pilgrim. But on the other hand, his care in taking the needful steps for the settlement of his son in life, as well as his seeking for himself during the remainder of his days the benefits and comforts of domestic fellowship, and his wise and timely adjustment of his earthly affairs, so as to do justice to all his descendants and prevent misunderstandings among them (Chap. xxv. 5, 6),—all this illustrates the entire consistency that there is between the most heavenly-minded preference of the world to come, and the most faithful discharge of duty in the world that now is; and shows how he who has his inheritance in heaven is only the better fitted, on that very account, for giving due heed to all the claims which earthly obligation and earthly relationships have upon his regard. We close the survey with a deeper impression than ever of the majesty with which, in the hands of a spiritual and poetic painter, this great example of faith might be invested. Of the original and natural temperament of Abraham, independently of his call as a believer, but few traces can be discovered in the narrative. He was already an old man when he received the summons to forsake all for the Lord's sake; and of what he was, and what he did before that era, Scripture says not a word, beyond the bare intimation that he was beginning, at least, to be involved in the growing idolatry of that age. (Joshua xxiv. 2, 3). We are persuaded, however, that if the devout students of God's word and ways would throw themselves into this history of Abraham's pilgrimage, with more of human sympathy than they sometimes do,—and with less of that captious spirit which a cold infidelity has engendered,—they would see more and more of the patriarch's warmth and tenderness of heart, as well as his loyalty to that God whose call and covenant he so unreservedly embraced. It is not of any material consequence to speculate on the amount of knowledge which Abraham may have had, with regard either to the righteousness which he appropriated, or to the inheritance which in hope he anticipated. How far he had a clear and definite view of the great principle of substitution, still more how far he had any conception of the actual person and work of a substitute who was, in the fulness of time, to live on the earth, and die, and rise again,—may be matter of very doubtful disputation. And it may be impossible to determine with absolute certainty, whether he specifically identified the inheritance promised to him with the land in which he sojourned. or merely looked in a general way for a portion in the resurrection state, or in the world to come, that might fairly be regarded as an equivalent. The main facts, as to his faith and hope, are these two:—first, that Abraham trusted in a righteousness not his own for his justification in the sight of God,—and secondly, that he sought his rest and reward in a heritage of glory beyond the grave. We may have clearer light on both these points. If so, then so much the greater is our responsibility. And it will be good for us if, by the grace of God, we are enabled to live up to our clearer light, as conscientiously as Abraham lived up to his more imperfect illumination; walking before God in uprightness, as he did,—and as strangers and pilgrims on the earth declaring plainly that "we seek a better country, even a heavenly."—(*Candlish.*)

In the section now completed, the sacred writer descends from the general to the special, from the class to the individual. He dissects the soul of a man, and discloses to our view the whole process of the spiritual life from the new born babe to the perfect man. Out of the womb of that restless selfish race, from whom nothing is willingly restrained which they have imagined to do, comes forth Abraham with all the lineaments of their moral image upon him. The Lord calls him to Himself, His mercy, His blessing, and His service. He obeys the call. That is the moment of his new birth. The acceptance of the Divine call is the tangible fact that evinces a new nature. Henceforth he is a disciple, having yet much to learn before he becomes a master in the school of heaven. From this time forward the spiritual predominates in Abraham; very little of the carnal appears. Two sides of his mental character present themselves in alternate passages, which may be called the physical and the metaphysical, or the things of the body and the things of the soul. In the former only, the carnal or old corrupt nature sometimes appears; in the latter the new nature advances from stage to stage of spiritual growth unto perfection. The second stage of its spiritual development now presents itself to our view; on receiving the promise, "Fear not Abraham; I am thy shield, thy exceeding great reward," he believes in the Lord who counts it to him for righteousness. This is the first fruit of the new birth, and it is followed by the birth of Ishmael. On hearing the authoritative announcement "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be perfect," he performs the first act of that obedience, which is the keystone of repentance, by receiving the sign of the covenant, and proceeds to the high functions of holding communion and making intercession with God. The last great act of the spiritual life of Abraham is the surrender of his only son to the will of God. It is manifest that every movement in the physical and ethical history of Abraham is fraught with instruction of the deepest interest for the heirs of immortality. The leading points in spiritual experience are here laid before us. The susceptibilities and activities of a soul born of the Spirit are unfolded to our view. These are lessons for eternity. Every descendant of Abraham, every collateral branch of his family, every contemporary eye or ear-witness might have profited in the things of eternity by all this precious treasury of spiritual knowledge.—(*Murphy.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 12–18.

THE GENERATIONS OF ISHMAEL.

This history illustrates the following truths:—

I. That those who are not appointed to the most honourable place are yet cared for by Providence. Ishmael was rejected as heir to the birthright, yet God was providing great things for him in the future. A mighty nation ruled by princes was to spring from him. Their roving and military character, their persistence, in spite of enemies and perpetual wars, is an evidence of their wonderful vitality. The control and the favours of Providence were not confined to the chosen people. God's dealings with the human race reveal the benevolent equity of Providence.

II. That Providence affords encouragements for the support of faith and virtue. The full accomplishment of the prophecies regarding Ishmael was not yet, for they stretched over long periods of time. But they were in course of being fulfilled. Events were opening up and pointing to the end indicated by prophecy. Already twelve princes, with their sovereignties, had sprung from Ishmael (verse 16). According to the promise made to Hagar, Ishmael died in the presence of all his brethren (Ch. xvi. 12). Thus the first steps were taken towards the fulfilment of those promises made to his mother to sustain her drooping spirits, and to his father to reconcile him to the casting out of his first-born son (Gen. xvi. 10–12; xxi. 18; xvii. 20; xxi. 13). God fulfils so much of His word as is necessary for the encouragement of his people. They have an earnest of their inheritance, and find that *in* keeping, as well as *after* keeping His commandments there is great reward.

III. That the faithfulness of Providence may be proved on different lines. We point to the past and present condition of the Jews as proofs of the truth of the Bible. We have a proof equally strong in the past and present condition of the descendants of Ishmael. The inextinguishable life of this people is a perpetual witness to the faithful word of God. These are converging lines, all pointing to the truth of Revelation.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse **12.** The historian, having adverted to the blessing of God upon Isaac, here pauses before proceeding with the sequel of his history to show how exactly the promises made to Ishmael (Ch. xvii. 20) were also fulfilled. His descendants, like those of Isaac, branched out into twelve tribes, and constituted the bulk of the population which spread over the Arabian peninsula.—(*Bush.*)

Verses 13–16. *Twelve princes*, princes of their tribes, as was promised (Gen. xvii. 20). See here what God can do for a poor boy sent out with a bottle of water on his back. God "setteth the solitary in families" (Ps. lxviii. 6). "He raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set him among princes" (1 Sam. ii. 8).—*(Trapp.)*

Verse 17. Ishmael lived an hundred and thirty-seven years. His death is here recorded by anticipation. It took place forty-eight years after Abraham's death, and when Isaac was one hundred and twenty-three years old. We may suppose that Ishmael died in the faith of his father Abraham, according to the patriarch's prayer for him.—(*Jacobus.*)

Verse 18. He had his dwelling and the territory of his descendants alongside of his brethren, and unsubjugated by them.—(*Jacobus.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses **19-22.**

THE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF ISAAC.

I. It is chiefly distinguished by the patient and retiring graces. He was not a man of activity and heroic boldness, like his father Abraham. He was rather a man of a patient, obedient spirit, of quiet meditative habits, altogether docile, gently susceptible to impressions, and retiring. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews notices him only as "blessing Jacob and Esau concerning things to come" (Heb. xi. 20). His child-like enquiries and patient silence upon Moriah (Ch. xxii), his love to Rebekah (Ch. xxiv.), his communion with Isaac at the burial of his father, his residing at the well Lahai Roi (Ch. xxv.), his mourning three years for his mother,—such characteristic acts and events in his life show what manner of man he was. He was distinguished by those graces and virtues, which, though in the sight of God are of great price, yet make but little noise in the world. Isaac does not fill any large place in the history. The *patient* side of the saintly character is here portrayed. There are few exciting incidents in the lives of such men, and therefore the world is heedless of their worth.

II. It was not exempt from great trial. He had heard of the promise that the family, of which he was now the chief, should multiply and become a great nation; yet he was still childless though he had been married for twenty years

It seems that he must be taught that the promised blessing is to come not as a matter of course, but as a gift of special favour. He must be exercised in the patience of faith. The great trial he now endured drives him to God (verse 21). In earnest supplication he tells the Lord of his perplexity. It speaks well for the quiet confidence of his faith that he did not resort to any carnal expedient like his father Abraham. His immediate trial is removed, but only to make way for another. The very blessing which is granted in answer to his prayer becomes itself a new source of anxiety (verse 22). But that anxiety is relieved by further revelations of the future (verse 23).

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 19. The ninth document here begins with the usual phrase, and continues to the end of the thirty-fifth chapter. It contains the history of the second of the three patriarchs, or rather indeed, as the opening phrase intimates, of the generations of Isaac, that is, of his Son Jacob. Isaac himself makes little figure in the sacred history. Born when his mother was ninety, and his father a hundred years of age, he is of a sedate, contemplative, and yielding disposition. Consenting to be laid on the altar as a sacrifice to God, he had the stamp of submission early and deeply impressed upon his soul. His life corresponds with these antecedents. His qualities were those of the son, as Abraham's were those of the father. He carried out, but did not initiate; he followed, but did not lead; he continued, but did not commence. Accordingly the docile and patient side of the saintly character is now to be presented to our view.—(*Murphy.*)

The history now returns to the Son of Promise. Throughout the whole of the Old Testament, though the history may diverge to notice other interests and peoples, yet it invariably returns to the chosen family whence the Messiah was to spring. That "the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus" is the internal principle of Revelation.

Verses 20, 21. Sarah was barren for at least thirty years; Rebekah for nineteen. This drew forth the prayer of Isaac in regard to his wife. The heir of promise was to be a child of prayer, and accordingly when the prayer ascended the fruit of the womb was given.—(*Murphy*).

When Bethuel, and Milcah, and Laban took leave of Rebekah, saying, "Be thou the mother of thousands of millions," they doubtless expected to hear of a very numerous family. And she herself, and her husband would, as believing the Divine promise, expect the same. But God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways as our ways. Abraham's other sons abound in children, while he in whom his seed is to be as the stars of heaven for multitude, lives childless. In this manner God had tried his father Abraham; and if he be heir to his blessings, he must expect to inherit a portion of his trials. Isaac had received Rebekah in answer to prayer; and let him not expect to receive seed by her in any other way.—(*Fuller.*)

Isaac entreated the Lord constantly and instantly, as the word signifies; he multiplied prayer, which (as those arrows of deliverance, 2 Kings xiii. 19) must be often iterated, ere the mercy can be obtained. *And the Lord was entreated of him.* Though it were long first, even full twenty years. God knows how to commend His mercies to us, and therefore holds us long in suspense. Manna, lightly come by, was as lightly set by.—(*Trapp*).

Under similar circumstances the husband and wife fast and pray, and make a vow before the temple that, should their desire be granted, they will make certain gifts (specifying their kind), or they will repair the walls, or add a new wing to the temple; or that the child shall be dedicated to the deity of the place, and be called by the same name; or they go to a distant temple which has obtained notoriety by granting the favours they require. I have heard of husbands and wives remaining for a year together at such places to gain the desire of their hearts. —*(Roberts.)*

Prayer leads the way to the ultimate solution of all the perplexities of God's people.

The trials of faith bring about that entire dependence upon God which prayer requires.

Verse 22. She is no less troubled with the strife of the children in her womb than before with the want of children. We know not when we are pleased; that which we desire ofttimes discontents us more in the fruition; we are ready to complain both full and fasting. Before Rebekah conceived, she was at ease; before spiritual regeneration, there is all peace in the soul; no sooner is the new man formed in us, but the flesh conflicts with the spirit. There is no grace where is no unquietness. Esau alone would not have striven: nature will ever agree with itself. Never any Rebekah conceived only an Esau, or was so happy as to conceive none but a Jacob; she must be the mother of both, that she may have both joy and exercise. This strife began early; every true Israelite begins war with his being. How many actions which we know not are not without presage and significance.—*(Bishop Hall.)*

Even the very answers to prayer may give rise to new sources of perplexity.

There are very different opinions as to the manner in which *she went to inquire of the Lord*. Some think it was simply by secret prayer; but the phrase, "to inquire of the Lord," in general usage signifies more than praying; and from its being said that she went to inquire, it is more probable that she resorted to some established place, or some qualified person for the purpose of consultation. We are told, 1 Sam. ix. 9, that "Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake:—'Come and let us go to the seer'; for he that is now called a prophet was beforetime called a seer." As Abraham was now living, and no doubt sustained the character of a prophet (Gen. xx. 17), she may have gone to him, and inquired of the Lord through his means. The Rabbinical writers, as usual, abound with fanciful conceits on this subject, but they are not of sufficient importance to deserve recital; nor can anything beyond conjecture be advanced upon this passage.—*(Bush).*

Under the pressure of trials we may even become discontented with our mercies.

Verse 23. A question might here arise as to the measure of light which such a communication, made in such circumstances, was fitted to throw on the plan and purpose of God, and the extent to which it was a revelation of His will, for the guidance of the parties interested at the time. It plainly established a distinction between Jacob and Esau while the children were not yet born, and it made that distinction hereditary. Moreover, it put the distinction upon a principal altogether opposed to that which naturally would have approved itself to the minds of the men of that generation—a principle only to be explained by its being resolved into an act of sovereignty (Is. lv. 8). Farther, as to the amount of the distinction, it conveyed to Jacob and his descendants, not only the national but the religious pre-eminence, which was attached to the divinely-recognised seed of Abraham. It made him the heir, not only or chiefly of the temporal prerogatives and possessions usually centred in the first-born, but of the spiritual privileges also, whether associated with these or not, that belonged to the chosen race. It constituted him the father of the Saviour—the ancestor and head from whom He was to come, who, as the seed of the woman, was to bruise the serpent's head, and in whom, as the seed of Abraham, all the families of the earth were to be blessed.—*(Candlish.)*

Undoubtedly, she herself is the prophetess to whom God reveals the manner and future of her delivery. Jehovah speaks to her. The word of revelation, though dark, infuses into her an earnest yet hopeful feeling of joy, instead of maternal sadness and despondency. Two brothers, as two nations—two nations, to contend and fight with each other from the very womb of the mother. The larger, or elder, and externally more powerful, governed by the smaller, the younger, and apparently the more feeble. In these three points the antithesis between Ishmael and Isaac is reflected again. The apostle (Rom. ix. 12) dwells upon this passage as affording a striking illustration and proof of the doctrine he was then teaching. Isaac was chosen over Ishmael, but further still, Jacob was chosen over Esau, though they were of the same covenant mother, and prior to their birth. The choice, election, was of grace.—*(Lange.)*

Observe here how the Jewish race is divided. All the previous history has been a division into two lines. First, the line of Abraham divides into that of Israel and Ishmael: Israel is chosen, Ishmael rejected. Then the line of Israel subdivides into those of Esau and Jacob. Jacob is chosen, and Esau rejected. And such is God's way. Of the Jews carried away captive into Babylon, only a remnant returned. All those belonging to the visible Church are not members of the true invisible Church. There will be at the end of the world, we are told, one taken and the other left. Many are called but few chosen—a chosen few like the few separated from Gideon's army. Of these two boys, Esau and Jacob, we see in one the gross man of the world, in the other a character far higher, though mixed with a certain craft or cunning. This sin was not repressed in youth, and it grew up with him into manhood. It is always so; unless the evil propensity is checked in childhood it will increase as life goes on, and that most wise saying is verified—"the child is father to the man." Esau is called in the Epistle to the Hebrews a profane—that is, a worldly person. His life was one of impulse, wanting in reverence, without any sensitive appreciation of things not level to his senses. Imprudent, incontinent, unable to restrain himself, he sacrificed the future to the present; he looked not beyond the passing hour; he sold his soul for pottage. We can scarcely account for his being the best beloved of his father, except on the principle of like joining to unlike.—*(Robertson.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 24—28.

BIRTH OF ESAU AND JACOB.

In this account of the birth of these two boys we observe—

I. Their marked individuality. These children were most unlike in their characters and dispositions. They seem as if they belonged to different races altogether. There was an antipathy between their characters even before birth. Tendencies develop themselves even before intelligent consciousness, and before there can be any personal responsibility. Thus there may be dark foreshadowings of a man's future history, even in the silent womb. In the first germs of man's physical life lie hid those potentialities which time and circumstance will afterwards develop. Though the individual himself commences a new life, yet he is complicated with the past. "Esau seems to have inherited from his mother the rash, sanguine temperament, but without her nobility of soul; from Isaac he derives a certain fondness for good living—at least of game. Jacob inherited from Isaac the quiet, contemplative manner; from Rebekah, however, a disposition for rapid, prudent, cunning invention. Outwardly regarded, Jacob, on the whole, resembled more the father,—Esau the mother." *(Lange.)*

II. How hereby is pointed out their future destiny. Esau comes into the world in a kind of hunter's skin. (Verse 25). Here was the cunning hunter—the man of the field—the dexterous taker of game. Jacob was a smooth man, designed for a gentler kind of life. He was essentially the domestic man, "dwelling in tents." (Verse 27.)

III. How their characters, so early developed, affected the preferences of their parents. (Verse 28.) "Isaac loved Esau." Perhaps because in him the opposite of his own character. Isaac himself was a quiet, contemplative man. Esau, on the other hand, was rash, wild, impulsive, and active. Also, Esau was his first-born son, and this conviction of his pre-eminence in birth may have weighed with his father more than all other claims. He might, too, have supposed that Esau was physically and mentally the most fitted to promote the promised prosperity and to achieve the assured victories of his race. Esau was a strong, bold man, and would therefore be the best fitted to secure Canaan for the family of Abraham. It is true that the oracle, pointing out a different destiny for the brothers, had spoken to Rebekah. But Isaac may have doubted its reality, or explained it away, or interpreted it according to his own temper or wish. We all know how our desires and feelings affect our beliefs. The reason for the father's preference, however, is given here, "because he did eat of his son's venison" (verse 28). Esau was like his father, in that he had a fondness for the pleasures of the feast. This matter of the venison may have been only one reason amongst others; it shows a *tendency*, and altogether points to the fact that the father's preference *was founded on nature, not on grace.* "Rebekah loved Jacob." She believed fully in the oracle which had been given to her. The character of Jacob was well suited to carry out her designs; for though he was a quiet man, he had a certain prudence and cunning.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 24, 25. The difference is manifest in the outward appearance. The first is red and hairy. These qualities indicate a passionate and precocious nature. He is called Esau the hairy, or the made up, the prematurely developed. His brother is like other children. An act takes place in their very birth, foreshadowing their future history. The second has a hold of his brother's heel, as if he would trip him up from his very birth. Hence he is called Jacob the wrestler, who takes hold by the heel.—*(Murphy.)*

Verse 26. Brothers unlike, hostile; twins even at enmity, whose physiological unconscious antipathy shows itself already in the womb of the mother—dark forebodings of life not yet existing, bearing witness, however, that the life of man already, in its coming into being, is a germinating seed of a future individuality. This cannot be meant to express a mutual hatred of the embryos. Antipathies however, as well as sympathies may be manifested in the germinating life of man as in the animal and vegetable kingdom.—*(Lange.)*

Verse 27. The boys grew, and it would seem that, as they grew, they were suffered very much to follow the bent of their inclinations in the choice of their respective occupations or modes of life. Their natures were different, and the difference, apparent in their very birth, was significantly indicated in their names. The rough and ruddy aspect of the first-born—more like the coarse robustness of a man than the smooth soft fairness of a child—led to his being called by a name denoting rugged strength, as if he were already full grown and mature; while on the other hand the seemingly accidental circumstance attending his brother's entrance into the world suggested an appropriate appellation. It is to this appellation, and its import, that Esau afterwards so bitterly alludes in his angry disappointment at the final settlement of the birthright (Gen. xxvii. 36). And to the same appellation, for a very different purpose, the prophet Hosea refers, as an instance or emblem of Jacob's favour with God and his destined superiority, worthy to be cited along with his wrestling with the angel (Hos. xii. 3, 4). With these names, the brothers as they grew up soon began to show that their natures remarkably correspond.—*(Candlish.)*

Esau's occupation was, perhaps, determined not only by his disposition, but also by his position in the family. He was the elder son and heir, and seems to have kept that position during his father's lifetime. The pursuits which he had taken up were of a noble character, and had ever been aspired to by the first-born of the earth. Jacob, on the other hand, seems to have been condemned to the drudgery of domestic service. He really occupied a subordinate place in the household, while his brother assumes the air of a prince and engages in princely sports. Instead of receiving a double portion of the inheritance, Jacob went forth a poor man from his father's dwelling.

In the dispositions of these two brothers there were 1. Sources of strength. In Esau there were the elements of courage, manly principles, practical power and energy. These might have made a strong character. In Jacob we have all that is quiet, modest, and retiring. These qualities, too, give strength to the religious life. 2. Sources of temptation. Esau was exposed to the danger of becoming coarse and impetuous, rash and ungovernable; while Jacob was likely to degenerate into a character that was timid, sly, and full of low cunning. Strongly marked elements of character may be made a power for good, but they may also become a power for evil.

Verse 28. The children please their parents according as they supply what is wanting in themselves. Isaac, himself so sedate, loves the wild, wandering hunter, because he supplies him with pleasures which his own quiet habits do not reach. Rebekah becomes attached to the gentle, industrious shepherd, who satisfies those social and spiritual tendencies in which she is more dependent than Isaac. Esau is destructive of game; Jacob is constructive of cattle.—*(Murphy.)*

There is "a dead fly in the ointment." "Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob." Alas, that the parents should be so shortsighted! Do they not perceive that a single blemish or mistake may make all their care and toil fruitless? Do they not especially note the quick kindling of the proud eye, or the sudden swelling of the indignant bosom, as the flattery of capricious fondness and the injustice of wanton cruelty and coldness by turns inflame and exasperate the feelings? Set not up, ye Christian parents, one child above another, but set up Christ above all. Let not Isaac love Esau because he "eats of his venison,"—sympathising in his venturous trade, and enjoying the fruits of it. Let not Rebekah love the more peaceful Jacob because, dwelling in tents, he gives her more of his company and fellowship. But let both learn to love their children in the Lord.—*(Candlish.)*

This preference of the father for Esau was,—1. A weakness unworthy of such a man. 2. It was the source of many troubles which afterwards arose in his family. Many of the distresses and vexations which embittered the remainder of Isaac's life are to be traced to this. 3. It kindled the flames of jealousy and resentment between the members of his family. 4. It was contrary to that principle of equity which should guide all conduct. Children of one family should be regarded with equal love.

How humiliating the reason assigned for Isaac's preference of his elder son! By what grovelling and unworthy motives are wise and good men sometimes actuated. How mortifying a view of human nature to see prudence, justice, and piety controlled by one of the lowest and grossest of our appetites!—*(Bush.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 29-34.

THE SALE OF THE BIRTHRIGHT.

In this transaction Esau is the marked man,—the warning example to all ages. His conduct has given rise to the established expression which denotes the barter of honour and fame for some passing pleasure, some present satisfaction of gross appetite; and in a higher application it denotes that worldly temper by which a man parts with eternal treasures for the sake of the fleeting treasures of this present world. Esau may be regarded as the founder of the Epicurean sort, of all whose motto and philosophy of life is, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Such is the chief lesson of this history. But this history, considered in itself, shows us that both the parties to this bargain are to blame. It was an unrighteous business, and altogether discreditable to the two brothers engaged in it. This is evident if we,—

I. **Consider the parties engaged in this transaction as ordinary members of society.** 1. *As to Jacob's conduct.* (1) *It was marked by unkindness unworthy of a brother.* Esau came tired and hungry from the violent toil of the hunter's field. The food which so seasonably appealed to his appetite, and for which he craved so pathetically, was prepared by his brother's hands who did not need it now. It was natural and seemly that one brother should ask food of another; and surely no one worthy of that name would refuse, especially in the extreme of necessity. To drive a hard bargain at such a time was most infamous. And even if it was necessary at all to bargain, surely something less might have been demanded. Jacob might have been contented with some portion of the proceeds of the day's chase. He grossly failed in the duty due to a brother. His conduct was most unfeeling. (2) *It was marked by low cunning.* To take an unfair advantage of his brother's need was a mean device. 2. *As to Esau's conduct.* (1) *He abandoned himself to the delights and temptations of appetite.* He saw the savoury food, and the language he used in asking for it shows how eager and craving was his hunger,—"Give me to eat, I pray thee, of the red, the red, the this" (Heb.). "Let me swallow some of that red, that red there" *(Delitzsch).* The present satisfaction of appetite overwhelmed all higher considerations, and sunk the nobility within him. We can scarcely regard him as being in very great straits for food, or really perishing for want. He was simply a tired and hungry man. There was surely some other food in his father's house which he could have provided himself with. But he would have, at all costs, this savoury dish. He had, probably, been accustomed to indulge in the pleasures of the palate so much as to render his principle weak in the hour of temptation from this source. (2) *He was lacking in a true sense of honour and nobility.* Had he possessed the honour of a man of the world, such as he was, he would have spurned such a pitiful proposal as this, and preferred a crust of bread and a cup of water to dainties offered to him on such conditions. He would have indignantly rebuked the meanness which dared to make such a proposal. If he had any nobility left in him he should have maintained his position in the family, at any inconvenience to himself. (3) *He was unconcerned for the peace of the future.* The transaction of this day could not fail to be a source of endless trouble for his family in the future, giving rise to disputes and bitter recriminations. It would tend to perpetuate enmities, and revive continually the flames of jealousy.

II. **Consider the parties engaged in this transaction as religious men.** 1. *As to Jacob's conduct.* (1) *It was irreverent.* This birthright was a sacred thing, dignified with a religious importance; yet Jacob, in a most profane manner, mixes it up with things secular. He makes it a commercial business of the meanest order. And this irreverence is all the more manifest if we consider (what is highly probable), that Jacob does not appear, from the subsequent history, to have enjoyed the rights of the firstborn in any temporal sense. If he then considered the birthright as a spiritual privilege, why does he think to purchase it with money? Is the inheritance of the heavenly Canaan to be bought for a mess of pottage? (2) *It showed a want of faith in God.* By the Divine oracle Jacob knew that he was the chosen heir to the highest privileges of the birthright. But he used human means for bringing about the purposes of God. He showed a want of faith in not trusting God to accomplish His own designs. Infinite wisdom has no need of our crude suggestions and poor help. Faith is content to rest upon the promise, and to wait. It is no part of our duty to go out of our way for the purpose of fulfilling prophecy. (3) *It was contrary to the broad free spirit of true piety.* No truly pious soul could think of making a purely spiritual matter the subject of bargain and sale. 2. *As to Esau's conduct.* (1) *It showed a powerlessness to resist temptation.* He was tired and hungry, and this savoury dish meeting his eye at such a time became a strong temptation. When he hears the artful conditions proposed, instead of resisting the tempter, he yields easily and speaks contemptuously of his birthright (verse 34). Such men may have much good nature in their dispositions, and be equal to the practice of easy virtues, but they are weak in the hour of temptation. (2) *It was profane.* This is the special point upon which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews insists (Heb. xii. 16). He regards Esau as the type of a "profane" or worldly man. (a) *He preferred the present to the future.* The mess of pottage was there before him, all ready for his enjoyment. The high privileges of his birthright were far away in the future. The claims of the future are vague and indistinct in worldly minds; but those of the present are vivid and powerful, prevailing over every other. This preference of the present to the future is the very essence of worldliness. *(b.) He preferred the sensual to the spiritual.* The sense of the pure and exalted blessings of the birthright was weak in him, but the desire for carnal indulgence was strong. Such is the temper of the children of this world, and such their choice. The claims of the flesh are paramount. *(c.) He preferred the near and certain to the distant and probable.* The mess of pottage was before him. There was no question but that it was a present and certain good. He could make sure of it. But the promised advantages of the birthright were far away. He might not live to enjoy them. "Behold," he said, "I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" (Verse 32.) A distant and spiritual good can only be realised by a strong faith. With most of the children of this world the things of heaven are either not thought of at all, or they come to be regarded as a great perhaps. The things of this world have the important advantage that they are sure. We know beyond all chance of mistake when we possess them. Such is the tyranny which this present world exercises over its children. Unless a strong deliverer comes to our rescue and saves us, we cannot escape from this house of bondage.

ESAU'S CONTEMPT OF HIS BIRTHRIGHT IMPROVED

Heb. xii. 16.

"*Lest there be any profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.*"

A "profane" person is one who despises or makes light of sacred and Divine things,—as the name, day, or Word of God, His ways and people. "As Esau," who, though the firstborn of Isaac, circumcised, and partaking of the worship of that holy family, was yet profane. His sin was his making light of the birthright and the blessings annexed to it. "The firstborn, as the root of the people of God, conveyed to his posterity all the blessings promised in the Covenant; such as a right to possess the land of Canaan, and to be the father of Him in whom all the nations were to be blessed, and to explain and confirm these promises to his children in his dying blessing to them." *(Macknight.)* These great advantages did Esau profanely despise, and when afterwards "he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected." Having lived, it seems, forty or fifty years in careless unconcern, he at length began to perceive how unwise a part he had acted, and sought to alter his father's mind but found no means of doing it, though "he sought it carefully with tears" (Gen. xxvii. 38). Let us consider—

I. **Whether there be not a birthright, which we may sell; or blessings to the enjoyment of which we are born, but which we may forfeit.** If we compare our state with that of *the inferior creatures*, and consider ourselves first as human beings, we shall find we are born to privileges far beyond any they are capable of possessing. We are rational, and capable of that knowledge of God, of His nature and attributes, His works and ways, which they have no capacity of attaining; knowledge which enlightens and enlarges, refines and purifies, entertains and delights; nay, and even feasts the mind. But this blessing we may sell. We are capable of loving Him, and being beloved by Him peculiarly, which they are not. The felicity of fixing our esteem and love on an adequate and worthy object, and of knowing ourselves to be noticed, regarded, and loved by a Being infinitely great and good!—this also we may sell. We are born capable of resembling Him, of bearing His image and likeness, which no inferior creature is. (Gen. i. 26, 27.) The glory and happiness of resembling the first and best of Beings!—this also we may sell. We are born capable of fellowship with Him; but how many rest contented without it? Compare our state with that of *the fallen angels*, and consider us as sinners fallen, but redeemed by the life and death of the Son of God: in consequence of which we are born to enjoy blessings which they are precluded from. (Heb. ii. 16.) Compare our state with that of *the heathen*, and consider us, called Christians, as born within the pale of the visible Church; and we are born to the privilege of having the Word and ordinances of God, and all the means of grace, in which the heathens have no share. Compare the condition of such as are *the children of religious parents*, or whose lot is cast among the wise and pious with those who are not so: and consider the privileges of a religious education. Compare the state of those who have *obtained a spiritual birth* with that of the rest of mankind. And yet these various birthrights, and a the blessings included in them, may be sold.

II. **For what consideration they who sell this birthright part with it.** "*For one morsel of meat.*"—For sin,—perhaps for one single besetting sin,—as drunkenness, uncleanness, injustice, defrauding, over-reaching, or dishonest gain.—There may be in the carnal heart a desire for this, as in the body an appetite for food, and it may appear desirable, useful, and even necessary; but it is only "one morsel of meat," its pleasure unsatisfying, and of short duration. The appetite returns as eager as before, and the vicious principle is nourished and increased, and becomes daily more unruly.—For the world, "the desire of the flesh." The gratifications of *sense*, the appetite and passion, in eating, drinking, and such like animal gratifications. This is parting with our birthright; which we have above the inferior creatures, viz., the dignity, glory, and felicity of our rational and immortal nature, for the pleasures of brutes; nay, for pleasures which many of them enjoy in greater perfection than we.—"The desire of the eye;" pleasing the eye of the body or of the mind with laying up money, with dress, furniture, planting, building, etc., with things grand, new, and beautiful. This is also unsatisfying, and of short duration. It is parting with heaven for earth, eternity for time, the Creator for the creature. It is parting with an infinite good for what is only at best finite, but is very small, if it be not rather an evil than a good; an eternal for a temporal one; a good belonging to, and necessary for, the soul, the better part of man, for one belonging to the body, the worse part. In other words, it is selling our birthright for "one morsel of meat."—"The pride of life:" the pomp, show and glitter of the present world; glory, honour, preferment, the praise of men; the gratification of pride, self-will, discontent, impatience, anger, malice, envy, revenge. This is parting with the pleasures of the saint or angel, for (not the pleasures, for pleasures they have none), but for the miseries of a devil. It is selling our birthright, not for one or many morsels of meat, but doses of poison; for what is sure to disorder, enfeeble, and destroy us. Now all this proceeds from, and manifests PROFANENESS. To be *profane*, taking the word actively, is, to make light of, and despise spiritual and Divine things, which men do because of their ignorance of them; their unbelief; their insensibility, and hardness of heart (Rom. ii. 4, 5); their carnal, earthly, and devilish mind. To be *profane*, taken passively, implies a person or place *separated*, or cast out from the society of things sacred. So holy things are said to be profaned when the veneration due to them is taken off, and they are exposed to common use and contempt. Thus those who reject, neglect, or treat with contempt their spiritual privileges and blessings, are already, like things common or unclean, cast out from the society of things and persons sacred and holy. Continuing to be so, they shall be everlasting outcasts from God, and shall find "no place of repentance, though they seek it with tears" (Matt. vii. 22, 23; xxv. 11; Luke xiii. 25–28).—[*Rev. J. Benson's Sermons, and Plans.*]

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 29. What a trifling circumstance in human life may lead to the greatest consequences!

Jacob had become a sage in the practical comforts of life. This *pottage* is a very common dish in that country. It is made of different grain or lentiles bruised and boiled as a broth. There was a red pottage, made chiefly of a red grain. While Jacob had this pottage fresh Esau comes in from hunting, and is faint and weary.—(*Jacobus.*)

Our appetites expose us to the dangers of temptation, both when they want and when they are satisfied. The greater portion of the trials of human life arise from this question of food.

The people of the East are exceedingly fond of pottage. It is something like gruel, and is made of various kinds of grain, which are first beaten in a mortar. For such a contemptible mess, then, did Esau sell his birthright. When a man has sold his fields or gardens for an insignificant sum, the people say, "The fellow has sold his land for pottage." Does a father give his daughter in marriage to a low caste man, it is observed, "He has given her for pottage." Does a person by base means seek for some paltry enjoyment, it is said, "For one leaf (*i.e.*, leafful) of pottage he will do nine days' work." Has a learned man stooped to do anything which was not expected from him, it is said, "The learned one has fallen into the pottage pot." Has he given instruction or advice to others, "The lizard which gave warning to the people has fallen into the pottage pot." Of a man in great poverty it is remarked, "Alas! he cannot get pottage." A beggar asks, "Sir, will you give me a little pottage?" Does a man seek to acquire large things by small means, "He is trying to procure rubies by pottage." When a person greatly flatters another, it is common to say, "He praises him only for his pottage." Does a king greatly oppress his subjects, it is said, "He only governs for his pottage." Has an individual lost much money by trade, "The speculation has broken his pottage pot." Does a rich man threaten to ruin a poor man, the latter will ask, "Will the lightning strike my pottage pot?"—(*Roberts.*)

Verse 30. ***Let me feed now on that red, red broth.*** He does not know how to name it. The lentile is common in the country, and forms a cheap and palatable dish of a reddish brown colour, with which bread seems to have been eaten. The two brothers were not congenial. They would therefore act each independently of the other, and provide each for himself. Esau was no doubt occasionally rude and hasty. Hence a selfish habit would grow up and gather strength. He was probably wont to supply himself with such fare as suited his palate, and might have done so on this occasion without any delay. But the fine flavour and high colour of the mess, which Jacob was preparing for himself, takes his fancy, and nothing will do but the red, red. Jacob obviously regarded this as a rude and selfish intrusion on his privacy and property, in keeping with similar encounters that may have taken place between the brothers.—(*Murphy*).

Esau becomes Edōm, and therefore, still the more remains Esau merely; Jacob, on the other hand, becomes Israel (Ch. xxxii. 28). Jacob is the man of hope. The possession that he greatly desires is of a higher order; hopes depending on the birthright. He never strives after the lower birthright privileges. Esau's insight into the future extended to his death only. But Jacob is as eager for the future as Esau is for the present.—(*Lange*).

Esau gained a second title to his name, as Jacob did afterwards (Gen. xxvii. 36). Thus the same name may owe its application to more than one occasion; and it is most important to remember this fact in reading these early histories.

Verse 31. These are the principal privileges which constituted the distinction of the firstborn: (1) They were peculiarly given and consecrated to God (Ex. xxii. 29). (2) They stood next in honour to their parents (Gen. xlix. 3). (3) Had a double portion in the paternal inheritance (Deut. xxi. 17). (4) Succeeded in the government of the family or kingdom (2 Chron. xxi. 3). (5) Were honoured with the office of the priesthood, and the administration of the public worship of God. The phrase "firstborn," therefore, was used to denote one who was peculiarly near and dear to his father (Ex. iv. 22), and higher than his brethren, (Ps. lxxxix. 28); and typically pointed to Christ and all true Christians, who are joint heirs with Him to an eternal inheritance, and constitute the *firstborn*, whose names are written in heaven (Heb. xii. 23). It should be understood that previously to the establishment of a priesthood under the law of Moses the firstborn had not only a preference in the secular inheritance, but succeeded exclusively to the priestly functions which had belonged to his father, in leading the religious observances of the family, and performing the simple religious rites of those patriarchal times. It is certainly possible, but not very likely, that in the emergency, Esau bartered all his birthright for a mass of pottage; but it seems more probable that Esau did not properly appreciate the value of the sacerdotal part of his birthright, and therefore readily transferred it to Jacob for a trifling present advantage. This view of the matter seems to be confirmed by St. Paul, who calls Esau a "profane person" for his conduct on this occasion; and it is rather for despising his spiritual than his temporal privileges that he seems to be liable to such an imputation.—(*Bush.*)

This brings to light a new cause of variance between the brothers. Jacob was no doubt aware of the prediction communicated to his mother that the elder should serve the younger. A quiet man like him would not otherwise have thought of reversing the order of nature and custom. In after times the right of primogeniture consisted in a double portion of the father's goods (Deut. xxi. 17), and a certain rank as the patriarch and priest of the house on the death of the father. But in the case of Isaac there was the far higher dignity of chief of the chosen family and heir of the promised blessing, with all the immediate temporal and eternal benefits therein included. Knowing all this, Jacob is willing to purchase the birthright, as the most peaceful way of bringing about that supremacy which was destined for him. He is therefore cautious and prudent, even conciliating in his proposal. He availed himself of a weak moment to accomplish by consent what was to come. Yet he lays no necessity on Esau, but leaves him to his own free choice. We must therefore beware of blaming him for endeavouring to win his brother's concurrence in a thing that was already settled in the purpose of God. His chief error lay in attempting to anticipate the arrangements of Providence.—*(Murphy.)*

The weakness and exhaustion of the body is a time of temptation. Jesus was tempted when He was "an hungred;" so was Esau. Jesus kept His birthright; Esau sold it away.

All temptations to worldliness resolve themselves into solicitations to sell our birthright. We were made for God and to show forth His glory, and to gain the distinctions and heritage of His children. If we serve the world we forfeit all this.

We have liberty to sell our heavenly birthright. It is a glorious gift this of liberty, but still an awful one.

Verse 32. Just because of the faintness that came over him, and his extreme desire to partake of this food, he sees nothing in the future so pleasant as his present repast would be. It seems amazing that he should so have seriously judged and acted. But it is no more amazing than the conduct of men every day, who put their present trifling gratification before eternal blessings. Often, indeed, in more temporal matters, men will sell a promise to pay, or a bond that has a long time to run, for a very small sum, to expend upon present indulgence. They argue as Esau did. Perhaps the idea was included that he could not live on promises. He might die soon, and then the birthright would do *him* little good; and hence he would prefer a small pleasure in hand. Esau seems to have set no estimate upon the spiritual privileges of the birthright.—*(Jacobus.)*

1. The good things of this world are *present*—those of the other, *remote* and *distant*. Now, we know that a present good has a great advantage above a far distant and late reversion. A candle that is near affects us more than the sun a great way off. So it is in regard to distance of time—there is more force and virtue in one single *now* than in many *hereafters*. The good that is present opens itself all at once to the soul, and acts upon it with its full and entire force. But that which is future is seen by parts and in succession, and a great deal of it is not seen at all; like the rays of a too distant object which are too much dispersed before they arrive at us, and so most of them miss the eye. This makes the least present interest outweigh a very considerable reversion, since the former strikes upon us with the strong influence and warmth of the neighbouring sun, the latter with the faint and cold glimmerings of a twinkling star. 2. The good things of this world are *sure* and *certain*. That is, as far as we are concerned. Our senses inform us of this. As for the place of happiness, we have heard the fame thereof indeed with our ears, but have neither seen it ourselves, nor discoursed with those who have; and although it is assured to us with as much evidence as is consistent with the nature and virtue of faith, yet darkness and fear commonly go together, and men are generally very jealous and distrustful about things whereof they are ignorant. Though the principles of faith are in themselves as firm and firmer than those of science, yet to us 'tis not so evident; nor do we ever assent so strongly to what we believe as to what we know. 3. The good things of this world strike upon the

most *tender* and *impressible* part of us—our *senses.* They tempt us, as the devil did Adam, in our weaker part, through the Eve of our natures. A sensible representation even of the vanity of the world would work more with us than the discourse of an angel about it; and I question not but that Alexander the Great was more inwardly affected when he saw the ruins of the grave of Cyrus, when he saw so great power reduced to such narrow limits, such majesty seated on such a throne; the monarch of Asia hid, or rather lost in an obscure cave, a stone for his bed, cobwebs for his tapestry, and all his pomp and glory turned into night and darkness; I say, he was more convinced of the vanity of greatness by this lively appeal to his senses than he ever was or could be by all the grave lectures of his master, Aristotle. The Devil, when he tempted the Son of God, might have entertained him with fine discourses about the wealth and glory of the terrestrial globe, and have read Him a geographical lecture upon the kingdoms and empires of it, but he knew his advantage better than that, and chose rather to draw a visionary landscape before him, and present him with a sensible idea of all this, knowing by old experience how much more apt the senses are to take impression than any other faculty of man.—(*Norris*).

These two lads are figures—Passion, of the men of *this* world, and Patience of the men of *that* which is to come; for, as here thou seest, Passion will have all now, this year; that is to say, in *this* world. So are the men of this world: they must have all their good things now. They cannot stay till next year, that is, until the *next* world, for their portion of good. That proverb, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," is of more authority with them than all the Divine testimonies of the good of the world to come. But as thou sawest that he had quickly lavished all away, and had presently left him nothing but rags, so it will be with all such men at the end of this world.—(*Bunyan.*)

Men seldom abstain from anything they are anxious to do for want of some excuse, on the ground of expediency or necessity to justify it. So it was with Esau. He was willing to part with his birthright to obtain this food, though he was too well aware of the value of his inheritance to alienate it without presenting to himself the semblance of a reason for so unequal a barter. He therefore makes the exposedness of his condition a pretence for the step. With this flimsy apology he endeavours to hide from himself the infatuation of his conduct. The spirit of his language was, "I cannot live upon promises; give me something to eat and drink, for to-morrow I die." Such is the spirit of unbelief in every age; and thus it is that poor deluded souls continue to despise things distant and heavenly, preferring to them the momentary gratifications of flesh and sense.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 33. With fickle men make all firm and fast.—(*Trapp.*)

Jacob will make a serious transaction of it, because he is alive to its import, and knew and valued what he was getting, as Esau did not value it. And so the transaction was solemnly concluded. Jacob held the birthright by a lawful tenure, and the transfer was valid. How many baptized youth sell their Christian birthright for such a mess of pottage! For present indulgence they turn their back upon Church privileges, and their covenant heritage, and barter away their future all.—(*Jacobus.*)

There was never any meat, except the forbidden fruit, so dear bought as this broth of Jacob: in both, the receiver and the eater is accursed. Every true son of Israel will be content to purchase spiritual favours with earthly, and that man hath in him too much of the blood of Esau who will not rather die than forego his birthright.—(*Bishop Hall.*)

Verse 34. It would have been a strong proof of his indifference to religious privileges had he sold them for all the riches that Jacob could have given him in return; but what can be thought of the infatuation of throwing them away for so very a trifle? How justly does the Apostle, writing as moved by the Holy Ghost, affix the epithet "profane" to the character of the man who "for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." It may, indeed, be said that it was unjust and unkind in Jacob to take advantage of his brother's necessity and thoughtlessness, but still this affords no real palliation of the conduct of Esau. The scriptures nowhere represent Jacob as a perfect character. There is no apology for Esau, whose criminality was enhanced by his evincing no remorse on account of what he had done. He expressed no regret for his folly, nor made any overtures to his brother to induce him to cancel the bargain. On the contrary, it is said that "he did eat and drink, and rose up and went his way," as if he were perfectly satisfied with the equivalent, such as it was, which he had obtained. But let us not forget how many there are that virtually justify his deed by following his example. Though living in an economy of light and love, yet what numbers are there who manifest the same indifference about spiritual blessings, and the same insatiate thirst after sensual indulgence as did Esau! The language of their conduct is, "Give me the gratification of my desires; I must have it, whatever it cost me. If I cannot have it but at the peril of my soul, so be it. Let my hope in Christ be destroyed; let my prospect of heaven be for ever darkened; only give me the indulgence which my lusts demand." Thus they go on in their worldly career regardless of consequences; they do not acknowledge and bewail their sin and folly; they do not repent and pray for pardon; they do not resort to the means which God in mercy has provided for the forgiveness of offenders. Alas, what a fearfully close resemblance in all this to the mad career of their prototype. We can only earnestly beseech all such to reflect deeply on their folly and danger, and to contemplate that moment when they shall be "at the point to die." Let them think what judgment they will then form of earthly and eternal things. Will they then say contemptuously, "What profit will this birthright be to me?" Will it then appear a trifling matter to have an interest in the Saviour, and a title to heaven?—*(Bush.)*

Esau was the type of the *carnal* man. He is the man of unbelief, as Jacob is the man of faith. He proves himself by his conduct to be unfit for the birthright, and so the plan of God is justified. We are all, like Esau, heirs of the election until we forfeit it.

Frivolity is the mark of the carnal mind. The children of this world "eat and drink, and rise up to play," regardless of the claims of God, and of the future.

"Thus Esau despised his birthright." He counted all the precious blessings of the covenant, both temporal and spiritual, as of less value than a mess of pottage. And thus men despise their spiritual birthright by practically reckoning it as nought.

The privileges of our election are not taken away from us until we learn first to despise them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Critical Notes.—1. The first famine that was in the days of Abraham.] This happened nearly an hundred years before the present one. *Abimelech.* Means, "My father, the king." This was probably a standing official name. Even in David's time a king of this country is called Abimelech. (1 Sam. xxi. 10. Comp. with Ps. xxxiv.)—**5. Kept my charge.]** Heb. "Kept my keeping," *i.e., My special commission.*—**8. Sporting.]** "That is, taking freedoms—using familiarities with her, such as exceeded those that were common between brothers and sisters." *(Bush.)*—**10. One of the people might lightly have lien with thy wife.]** "Lightly" equivalent to "easily." He intimates that the sin in that case would have been one of ignorance.—**13. Went forward.]** Heb. "Went or walked, going;" *i.e.*, "Became increasingly greater." The Heb. term for walk is frequently used in the sense of continued increase. **20. Strove.]** Heb. "They oppressed him."—**21. Strove for that also.]** This is a different word from the former, and signifies *contended. Sitnah.* From the term *Satan*, meaning *accusation*. **22. Rehoboth.]** Meaning *space, enlargement.*—**26. Ahuzzath.]** Called here "one of his friends," by which we are to understand *his privy counsellor. Phichol.* Probably an official name for the commander-in-chief. But Grove *(Biblical Dict.)* says that it is a Philistine name, of the meaning of which we are ignorant.—**33. And he called it Shebah; therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba unto this day.]** "He called the well *Sheba* (oath), in commemoration of the oath here made, thus confirming the name given the town by Abraham on the like occasion. (Gen. xxi. 31.) It is not here said that the place now first took its name, but that it retained its name under this new confirmation up to the writer's day. It was rather the *well* that was named by Abraham '*Beer-sheba*,' meaning 'Well of an oath.' Now the name was again given to the well, and was therefore fixed upon *the city*." *(Jacobus)*—**34. The daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath, the daughter of Elon the Hittite.]** These were the children of Heth, with whom Abraham dealt in the purchase of Machpelah.—**35. Grief of mind.]** "Greek, *Were contentious with.* Chald. *Were rebellious and stubborn against.* Jer. Targ. *They served God with a strange service*—were idolaters. Heb. *They were a bitterness of spirit to Isaac and to Rebekah*—a standing grief, not only because of their heathen descent, but also because of their uncongenial tempers. They brought only trouble into the family." *(Jacobus.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-5

The Covenant Renewed to Isaac.

I. It was renewed to him in a time of trial. The life of Isaac had run an even course, for many years, undisturbed by great troubles and exciting events. At length, a famine arose in the land (verse 1), so that he is threatened by privation and want. His father, Abraham, had endured great trials before him, and he must not expect to escape. This famine would be a great trial to Isaac, not only as a physical calamity, but also as a trial to his faith in God's word. He would be tempted to think lightly of the land of promise. Unbelief would suggest to him the thought that it was not worth waiting for. Exposed to such calamities it would prove but a sad heritage. The prospect was dark, but in the time of his deepest trial God appears to Isaac. Times of great trouble are times of great consolation. Divine help comes when all human efforts are exhausted.

II. It was renewed to him in the old terms, but resting on new grounds. The promises are essentially the same—though a little varied in their terms—as God had made to Abraham. The inheritance of the land—an innumerable posterity—the Divine presence and blessing—the assurance that the promise shall not fail—the same wide charity for the whole human race—these are virtually the same promises as those which had been long ago made to Abraham. But these rest now upon new grounds. Abraham was the *beginning* of the Church, and therefore God, in speaking to His servant whom He had called, rested upon His own *Almightiness* (Gen. xvii. 1). But the Church had already commenced a history in the time of Jacob. There was a past to fall back upon. There was an example to stimulate and encourage. There was someone in whom the power of God was manifested, and who had proved the truth of His word. Therefore to Jacob God rests His promises on the ground of his father's obedience. Thus the Lord would teach Jacob that His attributes are on the side of the saints—that they possess Him only so far as they are obedient;—that he must not regard the promised blessings as a matter of course, to be given irrespective of conduct, but rather as, by their very terms, demanding obedience;—and that the greatness of his people could only arise from that piety and practical trust in God of which Abraham was such an illustrious example (verse 5). But while obedience, as a general principle, was commended to Isaac, yet regard is had to *duty as it is special and peculiar to the individual.* The Lord said to him, "Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of" (verse 2).

To Abraham just the opposite command had been given. He was to leave his own country, but Jacob was to remain there. The particular duty was suited to the individual. God knows the strength of our temptations, and those weak points of our character when we are most likely to be overpowered. It was likely that the gentleness of Jacob's character could not resist the perils and temptations of Egypt. He did not possess that strong energy and hardy virtue which distinguished his father. He who will not suffer those who trust in Him to be tempted above that they are able, spared Jacob what must have proved a disastrous trial. There is a special *place* of duty for each one. Different men require to be tried in different ways of obedience. The history of Isaac was, for the most part, a repetition of that of his father. He had the same general duties to perform, but yet with a special difference suited to his character God knows where to place His servants.

THE FAMINE.

Here the first thing that suggests itself is the apparent contradiction of the promise given to Abraham, for instead of the land of abundance and rest Isaac found famine and unrest. Let us endeavour to understand that, and then we shall better understand this life of ours; for our life is to us a Canaan, a land of abundant promises, and especially so in youth. But we have not been long in this land of promise before we begin to discover that it falsifies itself, and then there arises in our mind the question that must have presented itself to Isaac, Has God broken His promise? We say God's promise, because the promises of life are all permitted by Him. The expectation of happiness is God's creation; the things which minister to happiness are scatterd through the world by God. But if we look deeper into it we shall perceive that God does not deceive us. True it is, that Isaac was disappointed; he got no bread, but he did get perseverance. He did want comforts, but with this want came content—the habit of soul-communion with God. Which was best, bread or faith? Which was best, to have abundance or to have God. Tell us, then, had God broken His promise? Was He not giving a double blessing, far more than He promised? And so it is with us. Every famine of the soul has its corresponding blessing; for, in truth, our blessed hours are not those which seem so at first; and the hours of disappointment, which we are tempted to look upon as dark, are the ones in which we learn to possess our souls. If, in the worst trial earth has, there does not grow out of it an honour which could not else have been, a strength, a sanctity, an elevation; if we do not get new strength, or old strength restored, the fault is ours, not God's. In truth the blessed spots of earth are not those which at first sight seem so. The land of olive and vine is often the land of sensuality and indolence. Wealth accumulates and engenders sloth and the evils which follow in the train of luxury. The land of clouds and fogs and unkindly soil, which will not yield its fruit unless to hard toil, is the land of perseverance, manhood, domestic virtue, and stately and pure manners. Want of food and of the necessaries of life, I had well nigh said that these things are not an ill, when I see what they teach; I had well nigh said I do not pity the poor man. There are evils worse than famine. What is the real misfortune of life? Sin, or want of food? Sickness, or selfishness? And when I see Isaac gaining from his want of food the heart to bear up and bear right onward, I can understand that the land of famine may be the land of promise, and just because it is the land of famine. And, secondly, we observe, respecting this famine, that the command given to Isaac differed from that given to Abraham and Jacob. Isaac evidently wished to go down to Egypt; but God forbade him (verse 2), although He permitted Abraham and commanded Jacob to go thither. The reason for this variety is to be found in the different character and circumstances of these men. In the New Testament we find the same adaptation of command to character. The man of warm feelings who came to Jesus was told "that the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." When the man from whom the legion of devils was cast out besought Jesus that he might be with Him, he received a similar rebuff; but the man of lukewarmness, who wanted to return to bury his father and mother, was not permitted for an instant to go back. The reason of the difference is this—that the man of impetuosity and forwardness needed to be restrained, while the lingering and slow man needed some active measure to stir him forward. It is almost certain that Abraham, being a wise man and a man of faith, was permitted by God to judge for himself, and that Isaac was required to turn back that he might learn the duty of trust; and that Jacob was commanded to go forth in order to cure his love of the world, and to teach him that life is but a pilgrimage. Hence we arrive at a doctrine: duties vary according to differences of character. The young, rich man had a call to give up all; that is not every man's duty. One man may safely remain in a place of idleness and luxury, having a martyr's spirit; whereas to another his own temperament, soft and yielding, says as with God's voice, Arise for thy life; look not behind thee, escape to the mountains. Hence, too, we learn another lesson: the place in which we are is generally God's appointed place for us to work in. Isaac was prohibited from going forth. He was commanded not to wait for another set of circumstances but to use those he had, not in some distant moment, but here, now, in the place of difficulty. And you: *do not wait* then for a more favourable set of circumstances; take them as they are, and make the best of them. Those who have done great things were not men who have repined that they were not born in another place or age, but those who did their work from day to day. It is not in moving from place to place that we find rest—in going down into Egypt because present circumstances seem unfavourable. No! Here where we are placed, even in the land of famine, in the dearth and darkness, we are to toil.—(*Robertson.*)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

The trials of the righteous are essentially the same from age to age.

Famines were of frequent occurence in those partriarchal times, and for ages afterwards were among the chief national calamities. Hence the many promises to the righteous in such seasons of trial.

Since Jesus multiplied the bread, famine has become a rarer thing in all Christian lands. This is but the beginning of His power to heal the earth.

Verse 2. Jehovah, for the first time, appears to Isaac and repeats to him the covenant promise.

Abraham in like circumstances had been permitted to go to the same country, and sojourn there during the extremity of the famine, yet this permission was denied to Isaac; perhaps because God forsaw that, from the native gentleness of his character, he would be less able than his father to encounter the perils and temptations with which he would meet among a people, from whose vices the more hardy virtue of Abraham himself had scarcely escaped unharmed. It would, indeed, have been easy for God to have armed him with a sufficient degree of inward fortitude to withstand the assaults to which his religious principles would be exposed; but this would have been a departure from the ordinary course of His moral government; and he consults his well-being at once more wisely and more kindly by sparing him the necessity of the conflict. When the heart and the general course of conduct is right, we may take it for granted that God will order His Providence with a special reference to our infirmities, so as graciously to anticipate and avert the evils into which we should otherwise have plunged ourselves.—(*Bush*).

The word "dwell" means strictly to "tabernacle, or dwell tent-wise." Thus while Isaac is commanded to dwell in the land, yet he must be reminded that he is merely a sojourner. The time had not yet come for him fully to possess the land of promise. Thus the founders of the Jewish nation were men who were compelled to live by faith (Heb. xi. 9).

Verse 3. To satisfy Isaac that he should never want a guide or a provider, the Lord renews to him the promises that had been made to his father Abraham. Times of affliction, though disagreeable to the flesh have often proved our best times. It is in this way that God is wont to arouse His sluggish servants to action by assuring them that their labour shall not be in vain. He does, indeed, claim at our hands, as a father from a son, a ready and unrecompensed service; but He is pleased by the exhibition of rich rewards to stimulate and quicken the diligence which is so prone to grow slack. This solemn renewal of the Covenant is distinguished by two remarkable features—(1) *The good things promised.* "I will be with thee, and bless thee." The sum and substance of the blessing is, the grant of the land of Canaan, a numerous progeny, and chief of all, the Messiah, in whom the nations should be blessed. On these promises Isaac was to live. God provided him bread in the day of famine, but he lived not on bread only, but on every word which proceeded out of the mouth of God. (2) *Their being given for Abraham's sake.* While all the essential good of the promise is assured to Isaac, and thus made a source of encouragement and comfort to him, any incipient rising of self-complacency is kept down by the intimation that it is rather to Abraham's merit than to his own that he is to look as the procuring cause of such signal favour.—(*Bush.*)

I will be with thee,—the first draft and outline of the picture, afterwards filled up, of Immanuel, "God with us."

Verses 4, 5. *All the nations.* In constancy of purpose the Lord contemplates, even in the special covenant with Abraham, the gathering in of the nations under the covenant with Noah and with Adam. (Gen. ix. 9; Hos. vi. 7.) *Because Abraham hearkened to My voice* in all the great moments of his life, especially in the last act of proceeding on the Divine command to offer Isaac himself. Abraham, by the faith which flows from the new birth, was united with the Lord, his shield, and exceeding great reward (xv. 1); with God Almighty, who quickened and strengthened him to walk before Him, and be perfect (xvii. 1). The Lord his Righteousness worketh in him, and His merit is reflected and reproduced in him (xxii. 16, 18). Hence the Lord reminds Isaac of the oath which he had heard at least fifty years before confirming the promise, and of the declaration then made that this oath of confirmation was sworn *because* Abraham had obeyed the voice of God. How deeply these words would penetrate into the soul of Isaac, the intended victim of that solemn day. But Abraham's obedience was displayed in all the acts of his new life. He kept the *charge* of God, the special commission He had given him; His *commandments,* His express or occasional orders, His *statutes,* His stated prescriptions, graven on stone, His *laws,* the great doctrines of moral obligation. This is that unreserved obedience which flows from a living faith, and withstands the temptations of the flesh.—(*Murphy.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 6–11.

ISAAC'S FALSE EXPEDIENT.

The false position in which Isaac placed himself with the men of Gerar was intended by him as an expedient to save the virtue of his wife. The purpose in itself was good, but the means he used were unworthy of a man divinely called to a life of faith and duty. He sinned against the truth. There are certain circumstances in this history which throw light both on the nature of his fault and on the character of the population around him.

I. **The temptation comes after a time of great blessing.** The great promises which God had given to his father had just been renewed to Isaac. It would seem as if nothing but peace and tranquillity must follow such great blessings. We find, however, that they are followed by a time of great trials. And such is the experience of the saints of God in all ages. We are wise and happy if we can use the time of great blessing so as to gather strength for future trials.

II. **He did not thrust himself in the way of temptation.** Isaac contributed nothing to the temptation by his own conduct. He obeyed the command of God by not going down into Egypt, and by sojourning in the land. He was in the way of Providence and of duty. His temptation arose naturally from the circumstances in which he was placed.

III. **He repeated the sin of his father, but incurs greater guilt.** About eighty years before this time, Abraham and Sarah had made a similar compact (Gen. xx. 13). It would appear that this was a common expedient with married people among strangers in those times of social insecurity. Isaac used his father's expedient, but forgot the bitter failure by which it was followed. There was before him an example which suggested warning enough, and therefore by repeating this fault he incurred greater guilt.

IV. **The treatment he received places heathen virtue in a favourable light.** Abimelech assures Isaac that his fears were groundless (verse 10). Though these people were idolators they still retained some salutary fear of God, and regarded the violation of the marriage covenant as a sin of the worst type. Isaac ought to have had a more generous faith in his neighbours, and therefore he merits a similar reproof to that which was administered to his father (Gen. xx. 9–11).

V. **His deliverance shows that God protects His saints from the evils which they bring upon themselves.** Isaac was delivered from the evils to which he had exposed himself. God used the virtue and integrity of Abimelech to protect him. The vain self-reliance and wicked policy of the old corrupt nature often bring God's saints into trouble. They may be beaten back for a time, still they hold on their way.

ISAAC'S FALSEHOOD.

The history of Uriah and David makes it easy to understand how such falsehoods came to be spoken; for in those unscrupulous days a stranger ran a risk of being put to death on some pretext that a royal tyrant might take his wife in marriage. We find that Abraham committed this very sin of lying twice before. Now in Isaac's case this certainly would account for, though by no means excuse, his lie. He had before him the example of his father's cowardly falsehood. And he copied it. We are thus ever prone to imitate the character of those we admire. Their very failings seem virtues; and hence comes a solemn consideration, that a good man's faults are doubly dangerous; the whole weight of his authority is thrown into the scale; his very virtues fight against God. Another thing which will help to explain Isaac's act is an idiosyncrasy of character. He was possessed of a kind of subtlety, an over-fine edge of mind; and the tendency of this is toward craft and cunning. Such characters see both sides of a question; go on refining and refining, weighing points of subtle casuistry, until at last they become bewildered, and can scarcely see the border line between right and wrong. It requires characters like Abimelech's, rude, straightforward, to cut asunder the knot of their difficulties. Observe, again, how this tendency to falsehood through over-refinement is seen in Jacob also, Isaac's son: thus it is that characters are handed down from father to son. Remark, too, another quality which accompanies such characters as Isaac's—want of courage: "lest I die for her." Contemplative men, who meditate at eventide, who are not men of action, want those practical habits which are oftentimes the basis of truthfulness. It is a want especially remarkable now. Never was there a day in which this tone of mind was more common, or more dangerous. Our day is not remarkable for devoutness; and the men who are so are not remarkable for manliness. They have somewhat of effeminacy in their characters—are tender, soft, wanting a firm, broad footing on reality. It is just to such minds as these that the Church of Rome offers peculiar attractions. She appeals to all that craves for awe, reverence, tenderness, mystery. Men get to live in mystery and shadows, and call it devoutness. Then in this borderland, between this reality and unreality,—this cloud region as it were,—truth itself melts away by degrees. Is it not an indisputable fact that, as soon as men leave our Church for Rome, their word is not to be trusted; that they get a double dealing spirit; a habit of casuistry, and of tampering with truth on plausible and subtle pretences which is a disgrace to Englishmen, not to say Christians! Therefore, let religious life strengthen itself by action. We want a more real life. A life merely prayerful, spent in dim religious lights, amidst the artistic parts of religion, architecture, chantings, litanies, fades into the unreal and merely imaginative soul passes into the false soul.—(*Robertson.*)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 6, 7. Gerar was probably a commercial town trading with Egypt, and therefore Isaac's wants during the famine are here supplied. "The men of the place" were struck with the appearance of Rebekah, "because she was fair." Isaac, in answer to their inquiries, pretends that she is his sister, feeling that his life was in peril, if she was known to be his wife. Rebekah was at this time not less than thirty-five years married, and had two sons upwards of fifteen years old. She was still however in the prime of life, and her sons were probably engaged in pastoral and other field pursuits.—(*Murphy.*)

The beauty of Rebekah exposed Isaac to great risk and brought him into this trouble. Thus every earthly good has some vanity attached to it.

This incident teaches us, that in swerving at all from the strict path of duty, we may be furnishing a precedent to others of whom we little dream. No man knows, in doing wrong, what use will be made of his example.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 8. There is here no Divine interference: all is human detection and human foresight. There is no further meaning in this verse than appears in the words. What passed was no more than is related, but was enough to justify the king's inference. —(*Alford.*)

Verse 9. But why was this a necessary inference? Might not Isaac justly have subjected himself to evil imputations? Might he not have been guilty of great crimes under the covert of his alleged relationship to Rebekah? The answer to this is highly creditable to the patriarch. It is clear that his general deportment at Gerar had been so uniformly upright and exemplary, that Abimelech knew not how to entertain an ill opinion of his conduct; and though his words were inconsistent with his conduct in the present instance, yet, judging from his whole deportment, he comes to the conclusion rather that his words had been somehow false, than that his actions had been wrong. Such is usually the paramount influence of a good life.—(*Bush.*)

Jacob feared for his own safety. Such quiet, calculating men often lack courage.

Verse 10. A just reproof for those who by their lack of manly and straightforward conduct expose others to sin.

The sin which the king of Gerar intimates might have been brought upon his people would have been strictly one of inadvertence or ignorance on his part. His words show, however, that it was a deeply fixed persuasion in the minds of heathen nations that the violation of the marriage covenant was a sin of deep die, and one which merited, and was likely to draw after it, the Divine indignation.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 11. The righteous indignation of Abimelech was worthy of a good king. On the other hand, the timid policy of Isaac was unworthy of a servant of God.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 12–33.

THE PROSPERITY OF ISAAC.

We have here a picture of the prosperity of the patriarch, and also of the blessings and dangers of that condition.

I. **His prosperity was evidently due to the Divine blessing.** His prosperity was wonderful. "Thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold," is the range of fertility in that land. Thus the yield of Isaac's land reaches the highest degree of productiveness. In ordinary cases the return is not greater than twenty-five or thirty fold. All this prosperity was due to the blessing of God. 1. *Such was the position of the sacred historian.* He who relates this history, after describing the prosperity of this man, adds, "And the Lord blessed him." (Verse 12.) 2. *It was evident to Isaac himself.* His prosperity, the rest he enjoyed from his enemies, and room to enlarge in, he ascribed all to God. (Verse 22.) 3. *It was evident to his enemies.* They were constrained to acknowledge that God was with him. The impression made by Abraham's character still lived in history, and they saw that the son was also a friend of God and enjoyed His presence and favour. (Verse 28.)

II. **His prosperity made him a mark for envy.** We are told that "the Philistines envied him." His prosperity was not without alloy. Every blessing of this world is accompanied by some disadvantage or evil. Civilisation is a blessing, but we lose thereby some of the virtues and natural endowments of simpler times. Great possessions are a blessing, but they often rob us of our quiet and repose, and they bring us new anxieties. High station in society is a blessing, but it oftens renders a man the object of jealousy. He becomes public property, and he is robbed of his peace. We have to pay a price for every earthly good.

III. **His prosperity served to develop the virtues of his character.** Bacon has said that, "Prosperity doth best discover vice, but adversity doth best discover virtue." And human experience shows that such are the usual effects of these conditions. But in the case of Isaac there were virtues that shined out in his prosperity. 1. *The virtue of patience.* The Philistines carried their envy into action. They stopped up the wells which he had inherited from his father. (Verse 15.) But he met all this envy by patience. When persecuted in one place he fled to another. He removed from well to well. (Verses 18–22.) (*a.*) *His patience was victorious.* It won upon his enemies. The Philistines were, at length wearied out. They came round, and asked for a treaty. (Verses 28–30.) (*b.*) *His patience won the Divine approval.* The Lord appeared to him and renewed the old promises. He was assured of perpetual protection and guidance. 2. *The virtue of forgiveness.* He had suffered a grievous wrong, but he forgave it on the entreaty of Abimelech. This was not the easy virtue of a man who has no strong feelings and who is soon won over. He keenly felt the wrong. His sense of honour was wounded, he smarted under the indignity. It was *principle*, and not a weak feeling, that made him forgive. So it was with our Lord Himself, who while He could forgive in the greatness of His love, could yet feel indignity and shame under the cruel taunts and ingratitude of His enemies. He could say, "Why smitest thou Me?" "Are ye come out against me as against a thief with swords and with staves.?" 3. *The virtue of reverence.* He set up an altar for the worship of God and pitched his tent there as if he would dwell in the Lord's house. (Verse 25.) He bears a public testimony to the obligation of religion. Many a man forgets God with increasing prosperity, but it was not so with Isaac. With him it served to deepen the feeling of reverence and to strengthen every duty of piety. He kept up the old traditions of his father. (Verse 33.) When he opened again the wells which Abraham had digged he called them by the old names. (Verse 33.) This would remind him to follow in his father's faith and footsteps.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 12, 13. It is a further stage in progress when a wandering tribe changes from a pastoral to an agricultural people. In this advance we see the preparation of the chosen people to become a great nation.

Verse 14. Here again we see how vanity attaches to every earthly good; prosperity begets *envy*, and from envy proceeds *injury.*—(*Fuller.*)

Envy is the constant companion of prosperity, as David felt and complained. Succoth and Peniel contemn Gideon, out of envy of his victory; Joseph's brethren cannot abide him, because more favoured of his father. Korah maligneth Moses; Saul, David; the Pharisees, our Saviour; their malice wilfully crossing their consciences.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 15. In those countries a good well of water was a possession of immense value; and hence in predatory wars it was always an object for either party to fill the wells with earth or sand in order to distress the enemy. Had the Philistines merely forced their way to these wells and drank of them, it might have been encased; but to stop them was an act of downright barbarity, and a gross violation of the treaty of peace which had been made between a former Abimelech and Abraham (Gen. xxi. 25–31). But envy considers that which is lost to another as gained to itself, and not only delights in working gratuitous mischief, but will even punish itself, in a measure, to have the malicious satisfaction of doing a still greater injury to an enemy.—(*Bush.*)

Verses 16, 17. Abimelech understood the temper of his people and therefore he sought to persuade Isaac to remove. He used the language of compliment and flattery. Isaac might have stood upon his ground and urged the rights of the covenant made with his father. But he was a man of peace, and choose rather to forego a right than enter into a quarrel. He acted upon the maxim of the wise man,—"yielding, pacifieth great offences."

A little with peace and quietness is better than much with envy and contention.—*(Fuller.)*

Verse 18. It is a pious duty to keep up the memorials of the great and good.

It seems wherever Abraham went, he improved the country; and wherever the Philistines followed him, their study was to mar his improvements, and that for no other end than the pleasure of doing mischief. Isaac, however, is resolved to open these wells again. Their waters would be doubly sweet to him for their having been first tasted by his beloved father; and to show his filial affection still more, he "called their names after the names which his father had called them." Many of our enjoyments, both civil and religious, are the sweeter for being the fruits of the labour of our fathers; and if they have been corrupted by adversaries since their days, we must restore them to their former purity.—(*Fuller.*)

Verses 19, 20. Isaac's servants also digged *new wells*, and which occasioned new strife. While we avail ourselves of the labours of our forefathers, we ought not to rest in them without making farther progress, even though it expose us to many unpleasant disputes. *Envy* and *strife* may be expected to follow those whose researches are really beneficial, provided they go a step beyond their forefathers. But let them not be discouraged: the wells of salvation are worth striving for, and after a few conflicts, they may enjoy the fruits of their labours in peace.—(*Fuller.*)

Verses 21, 22. We are told that he met the envy with patience, and removed from well to well. At last the Philistines desisted. Thus patience wears the world out. Endurance, meekness, the Gospel spirit, this is the only true weapon against the world. Hence, Christianity can have no addition. It is final. There is nothing beyond this—"Love your enemies." Isaac, like Christ, had conquered by meekness.—(*Robertson.*)

Verses 23, 24. There is shed abroad in his heart that deep peace which is most profound in the midst of storm. God was with him. The waves which lash the surface of the sea are only on the surface; below, the depths are calm. And Isaac quietly leaving place after place felt the deeps of his soul untouched. What was the loss of a well, or ten wells, to him with whom God was, for his portion, his exceeding and all-sufficient great reward.—(*Robertson.*)

"God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Therefore Isaac is assured that his father has not perished by death, that he is not clean gone for ever with the breath which he gave up. God's covenant with his friend was not annulled.

This is the same person as the Angel of the Covenant who appeared to Moses in Horeb, in the burning bush (Ex. iii. 2) and is therefore the Messiah. Abraham was the man of faith, Isaac the man of endurance, and Jacob was the man of prayer. God is God to each believer in his peculiar circumstances. Isaac is here promised the blessing for Abraham's sake. This is the actual working of the household covenant. God has so displayed Himself in all the history of the Church as a covenant God to the families of His people.—*(Jacobus.)*

Verse 25. He called upon the name of the Lord that had made room for him; and now, by His presence and promise, comforted him. Let the streams of God's bounty lead us, as the watercourse doth, either to the spring upward, or downward to the main ocean, to the source and fountain whence they flow. Let God taste of the fruit of His own planting. We are no better than brute beasts, if, contenting ourselves with a natural use of the creatures, we rise not up to the Author; if, instead of being temples to His praise, we become graves of His benefits. Isaac first built an altar, and then digged a well.—*(Trapp.)*

Every dwelling-place of the godly should be a sanctuary.

Verses 26, 27. True meekness does not arise from insensibility. The meek keenly feel the wrongs and indignities committed against them.

Isaac, while they acted as enemies, bore it patiently, as a part of his lot in an evil world; but now that they want to be thought friends, and to renew covenant with him, he feels keenly, and speaks his mind. We can bear that from an avowed adversary which we cannot bear from a professed friend; nor is it any transgression of the law of meekness and love plainly to signify our strong perception of the injuries received, and to stand on our guard in dealing with those who have once acted unfairly.—(*Bush.*)

Ver. 28. The world pays an involuntary tribute of respect and admiration to good men. This is the crown of glory which society places upon their head.

Verse 29. They had shown acts of hospitality to Isaac at first; but their kindness soon turned to hatred, and their hatred to persecution. Men magnify the few acts of kindness they have done for others, but forget the many wrongs they have committed against them.

"Thou art now the blessed of the Lord." This explains the one-sidedness of the covenant. Isaac needed no guaranty from them as Jehovah was with him. This clause may refer to his being under the Divine protection, and therefore safe, or as being sufficiently provided for not to make account of the injury done him by the servants. Or it may express the king's ***salaam*** at the conclusion of the treaty pronouncing him blessed, or supposing he makes the treaty as proposed, calling him ***blessed of Jehovah.***—(*Jacobus.*)

Verses 30, 31. It was a large-hearted generosity which was content to admit so poor a plea. He who would work out great purposes of charity towards mankind must be prepared to make large allowances.

This reconciliation between Isaac and Abimelech was pledged in a feast. They both sware unto one another; so is our reconciliation with God pledged in the Christian feast of the Lord's Supper.—(*Robertson.*)

Ver. 32. Blessings follow quickly in the path of a large-hearted charity. As Isaac forgave them for depriving him of his wells (rather than quarrel with them), so the Lord opened to him another well for his need ***the same day.***—(*Jacobus.*)

Verse 33. ***Beer-Sheba unto this day.*** So it was before; but the name was almost worn out, the well being stopped up. Isaac therefore now names it, and so preserves it for a monument of God's mercy to his father and to himself.—(*Trapp.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verse 34-35.

Esau's Marriage.

I. It was in accordance with his character. The manner in which he disposed of his birthright showed a man prodigal and careless of consequences. He carried this disposition with him thoughout life, and his marriage was no exception to the general course of his conduct. Given certain dispositions and propensities, and answering circumstances, and a man's actions may be predicted with tolerable certainty. Esau in the matter of his marriage did what we might naturally expect such a man to do.

II. It was irreligious. 1. *It was against the interests of the Church of God.* He married women who belonged to a heathen nation,—the *Hittites* whom God had cursed, and who were steeped in crime and corruption. This was an unholy alliance, most certain to lower the tone of his own character and to injure the prospects of the Church of God. As a fact of history he was the father of a nation who through long centuries were the perpetual enemies of Israel. 2. *It was a transgression of duty towards his parents.* He was old enough to be free from the direct control of his parents—to act and choose for himself. But he ought not to have acted contrary to their wish, especially when that wish was reasonable and righteous. His conduct was a "grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah." It may truly be said, that one of the greatest griefs of this sad world is the grief caused by children to their parents.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 34. 35. Esau had got acquainted with this tribe in his hunting expeditions. They belonged to a family gone in transgression and apostacy from God. The two wives chosen from such a stock were a source of great grief to the parents of Esau. The choice manifested his tolerance at least of the carnal, and his indifference to the spiritual.—(*Murphy.*)

CHAPTER XXVII.

CRITICAL NOTES.—3. **Take some venison.]** Heb. *Hunt a hunt for me.* "What this hunt should be except of the deer or gazelle, does not appear. And hence it is not surprising that kids of the flock answered the purpose when so cooked and flavoured as to make a savoury dish." (*Jacobus.*)—15. **Goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau.]** Heb. *The desirable garments.* The choicest garments belonging to Esau were put upon Jacob. From verse 27 it would appear that somewhat of the odour of the field clung to these garments. "They were probably best, or state garments of 'my lord' Esau, in which he sought the companies of his brother hunters, and redolent (verse 29) of the aromatic shrubs of the wilderness which they had hasted through." (*Alford.*)—16. **Skins of the kids of the goats.]** These were the skins of the Syrian goat, the hair of which, though black, is long and soft. It looks and feels very much like human hair, whence the Romans employed it for wigs and other artificial coverings of the head.—20. **The Lord thy God brought it to me.** The name for the covenant God of the patriarchs is used. Heb. *Made to meet before me.* The meaning is, God hath brought it in my way by making circumstances to meet together for my success.—27. **And blessed him.]** The blessing (verse 27–29) is in the form of poetic parallelism.—28. **The dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth.]** In Palestine these are closely connected. The dews are copious, and make up for the lack of rain during several months of the year. The dew of Hermon, and the dew upon the mountains of Zion are spoken of by the Psalmist as an evidence of the Divine blessing. (Ps. cxxxiii.; Deut. xxxiii. 13, 28.)—39. **Thy dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above.]** The preposition is here used in a *privative* sense, *apart from the fatness of the earth*, etc. "The opening words most likely signify the very contrary of that by which the A. V. renders them. Esau was to dwell in the barren land of Idumea, far off from the fertility of his brother's lot. Travellers say that Edom is probably the most desolate and barren upland in the world. No words could more accurately describe the habits of its inhabitants than those of living by their sword, existing as robbers and free-booters." (*Alford.*)—40. **And it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.]** "The Edomites were to be subjugated by Israel, but would in time assert their liberty and succeed in shaking off the yoke. This they did in the reign of Joram. (2 Kings viii. 20.) They were brought under again by Amaziah's. (2 Kings xiv. 7; 2 Chron. xxv. 11.) In the latter days of the kingdom of Judah the Edomites were a cause of annoyance. (2 Chron. xxviii. 17.") (*Alford.*)—45 Why should I be deprived also of you both in one day! If Esau killed Jacob, she must lose them both, for the avenger of blood would punish Esau with death.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-4.

Isaac in the Near Prospect of Death.

I. He has warnings of his approaching end. 1. *His advanced age.* He was now 137 years old. His son, Esau, had now been married 37 years; and his brother, Ishmael, had been dead 14 years. He himself thought, very naturally, that he was near his end, though, as it happened, he did not die till 43 years after this time. He felt that the world was going rapidly from him. Friend after friend was departing. The years of man's age are like the milestones on the journey, we feel that we have not much further to go. Whatever we may put into life; however we may expand the measures of it by holy thoughts and deeds, or make it monstrous by wickedness, the length of it is a measured quantity. Our Lord has taught us that we cannot add a cubit to the length of our life's journey (Matt. vi. 27). And Job, long ago, speaking of man, the length of whose mortal day is appointed by his Maker, says, "Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with Thee, Thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass." (Job xiv. 5.) 2. *Signs of weakness and decay.* Dim eyes, trembling limbs, loss of memory, a languid interest in present things and a tenacious clinging to the past are signs that life is wearing away and that the end is near. It is a merciful Providence that to most men death does not come suddenly to cut them off in the midst of high health, but their way to the dark house is by a gentle descent. God sends them reminders of their latter end, and the man says, "Behold now I am old, and I know not the day of my death." Young men may die, old men must; they have one foot already in the grave.

II. He sets in order his worldly affairs. He feels now that the time has come for him to discharge any remaining duties towards the living. For soon the hour is coming when he can no longer work, and whatever has to be done must be done quickly. 1. *Duties prompted by the social affections.* There are those who have grown up around us, and who are associated with us by natural ties, to whom we owe certain duties. We are bound to show them kindness and regard. We have but a short time in which to discharge those obligations, for death will not stay. Isaac wishes to bestow his blessing upon his eldest son, and to receive a kindness from him for the last time. His fond affection would be gratified, and his son would receive honour thereby. He would discharge a debt of love and celebrate the satisfactions of his feelings by a joyful feast. 2. *Duties regarding the settlement of inheritance and property.* Life was uncertain, and therefore Isaac must contrive so that there may be no disputes after his death. He wishes to settle the position which his sons were to occupy in the family, according to his own notions of right. It is best for a man to arrange all such matters while his mind is clear, and before he is perplexed andconfused by the last sickness. In this way he can dismiss the world, and secure for himself a tranquil time before the end. It is well to have some time to walk quietly and thoughtfully along the shores of eternity before we take our last voyage to the unknown scenes beyond life. The conduct of Isaac, at this time, shows a thoughtfulness and a calmness worthy of his reputation as a contemplative man. He is still able to enjoy a feast, and looks forward to some brief renewal of his vigour and spirits. In all this, surely, there is a gleam of immortality. He is about to do something which will take effect after his death. If this life be all, why should we consider the brief enjoyments and distinctions of those who must in a few short years sink with us into nothingness, as though we had never been! Surely the only attitude of mind which we could assume towards such a blank and ruined prospect would be that of despair! But man feels in the depths of his heart that he must have, in some way, an interest and inheritance in the future.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1, 2. Dimness, and even loss of sight, is more frequent in Palestine than with us.

Old age itself is a disease, and the sink of all diseases. "The clouds return after the rain." A continual succession of miseries, like April weather, as one shower is unburdened, another is brewed, and the sky is still overcast with clouds. Lo, such is old age. And is this a fit present for God? Wilt thou give Him the dregs, the very last sands, thy dotage, which thyself and thy friends are weary of? "Offer it now to thy prince, will he be pleased with thee?" (Mal. i. 8.) But God will not be so put off. He is "a great king," and stands upon his seniority (Mal. i. 14.)—(*Trapp.*)

Esau had been perverse and undutiful in marrying into the stock of Canaan, yet his father's affection still clings to him. How strong is parental love to surmount the worst obstacles!

That the time of death should be uncertain is a benevolent provision, for a man is thereby enabled to continue his services to mankind until the last moment in which he can be useful. The knowledge of the exact time, as fixed and unalterable, would throw a disturbing and perplexing element into human affairs.

Verses 3, 4. Isaac's inordinate love of the pleasures of appetite still clung to him. How strongly rooted are old habits and propensities!

The words of dying men are living oracles. It was the patriarch's care, and it must be ours, to leave a blessing behind us; to seek the salvation of our children whilst we live, and to say something to the same purpose when we die, that may stick by them. So when we are laid in our graves, our stock remains, goes forward, and shall do till the day of doom.—(*Trapp.*)

Why was "savoury meat" required in order to the bestowment of the blessings? The design of it seems to have been not merely to strengthen animal nature, but to enkindle affection. Isaac is said to have *loved* Esau on account of his venison (Gen. xxv. 23): this therefore would tend, as he supposed, to revive that affection, and so enable him to bless him with all his heart. It seems however, to have been but a carnal kind of introduction to so Divine an act: partaking more of the flesh than of the Spirit, and savouring rather of that natural affection under the influence of which he at present acted, than of the faith of a son of Abraham. —(*Fuller.*)

It is probable that Isaac demanded something better than ordinary, because this was to be also a peculiar day. To all appearance it was a Divine providence through which Jacob gains time to obtain and bear away the blessing from him.—(*Lange.*)

Verse 5. Isaac's carefully calculated project is thwarted by a woman's shrewdness. A carnal policy can always be met by its own weapons.

Rebekah overhearing this charge of Isaac to his son Esau, takes measures to direct the blessing into another channel. It was just that Esau should lose the blessing, for by selling his birth-right he had despised it. It was God's design too that Jacob should have it. Rebekah also knowing of this design, from its having been revealed to her that "the elder should serve the younger," appears to have acted from a good motive. But the scheme which she formed to correct the error of her husband was far from being justifiable. It was one of those crooked measures which have too often been adopted to accomplish the Divine promises; as if the end would justify, or at least excuse the means. Thus Sarah acted in giving Hagar to Abraham; and thus many others have acted under the idea of being *useful* in promoting the cause of Christ. The answer to all such things is that which God addressed to Abraham: "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be Thou perfect."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6–10.

REBEKAH'S CUNNING PLOT IN FAVOUR OF JACOB.

I. The human element in it. 1. *The partiality of a fond mother.* She tenderly loved this son, and was ready to sacrifice herself to promote his welfare and distinction. 2. *Ambition.* She wanted to see her favourite son raised to the highest honour. Yet her ambition was devoid of selfishness, for she asked nothing for herself, but only for Jacob. "But here is a trait of female character: it is a woman's ambition, not a man's, doing wrong, not for her own advantage, but for the sake of one she loved. It is a touch of womanhood." —(*Robertson.*)

II. The religious element in it. We must remember that we are dealing here with the history of the Church of God. These persons are mentioned, and their acts related because they have to do with this history. We justly blame Rebekah, but we have to consider her conduct in the light of her circumstances and character. Her faith in God was placed in circumstances of great trial. 1. *It seemed as if the oracle of God was likely to become void.* The purpose of Isaac was known, and it was against God's revealed purpose. The stubbornness of an old man forbade the thought that he would listen to argument, or set aside the claims of a long-cherished affection. The known will of God and the known will of her husband were at variance. It is a difficult matter to trust in God alone, and to forsake all leaning upon ourselves. 2. *The crisis was urgent.* Isaac had taken steps to carry out his intention. He supposes himself to be on his deathbed and, therefore, makes up his mind to impart the blessing, which when once bestowed was irrevocable. What in this emergency is the believing wife to do? It was of no use to try mild measures, for the mind of the old man was weak and his purpose too deeply seated. She ought to have left the matter with God, and to be content to be still, to trust, and to wait. But it is a hard trial to allow a great evil to happen when we have the means of preventing it. To work and scheme is more easy than to be silent. When we see the declared will of God likely to be thwarted, it seems as if any device of ours to prevent it becomes a justifiable, and even a pious necessity. The sin of Rebekah was of a complex nature. Hence how difficult it is to estimate human conduct if we only regard it from the outside. "We label sins as by a catalogue. We judge of man by their acts; but it is far truer to say that we can only judge the acts by the man. You must understand the man before you can appreciate his deed. The same deed, done by two different persons, ceases to be the same. Abraham laughed, and so did Sarah: one was the laugh of scepticism, the other the result of that reaction in our nature by which the most solemn thoughts are balanced by a sense of strangeness, or even ludicrousness. The Pharisees asked a sign in unbelief; many of the Old Testament saints, in faith. A fine discrimination is therefore needed to understand the simplest deed. A very delicate analysis of character is necessary to comprehend such acts as these and rightly apportion their turpitude and their palliations."—(*Robertson.*)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 6. She overheard what Isaac spoke secretly. Women will be listening; as Sarah behind the door, when she laughed, and little thought to be questioned for it.—(*Trapp.*)

Verses 7–10. The sin of deceiving a man into what is right differs little from deceiving him into what is wrong. The effect of the sin may, indeed, be different; but its moral character in the eyes of Omniscience is substantially the same. The slightest deviation from the straightforward principles of integrity and honesty is contrary to the very genius and actings of a true faith; and though the event was overruled to good, yet this was no justification of the parties concerned. Evil ceases not to be evil because God makes it redound to His glory.—(*Bush.*)

God inclines the love of the mother to the younger, against the custom of nature, because the father loves the elder, against the promise. The affections of parents are divided; that the promise might be fulfilled, Rebekah's craft shall answer Isaac's partiality. Isaac would unjustly turn Esau into Jacob, Rebekah doth as cunningly turn Jacob into Esau: her desire was good; her means were unlawful. God doth oft-times effect His just will by our weaknesses; yet neither thereby justifying our infirmities, nor blemishing His own actions.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 11–24.

REBEKAH'S CUNNING PLOT ACCEPTED AND CARRIED OUT BY JACOB.

I. Reveals some qualities of Jacob's character. 1. *He was a weak and pliable man.* He had little moral strength to resist temptation. 2. *He lacked the power of self-determination.* He had no skill of invention or contrivance. Hence he fell in with the designs of his mother. 3. *He was fearful of consequences.* He objects not to what is wrong in the proposed action, but to the risk he is running. (Verse 12.) It is enough, if he can only be assured of success. 4. *He could long indulge the thought of that which was forbidden.* He had formed the steady purpose to complete the sin which he had committed against his brother in taking away his birthright. He had long meditated evil things, and to such a man the opportunity, sooner or later, will present itself. The ambition to obtain the coveted blessing was long cherished, and the hour of temptation came and secured him as an easy victim.

II. Reveals the gradual debasement of Jacob's character. He did not intend to cast off all moral restraints, and to allow himself to fall into the ways of wickedness. But he had little strength to resist temptation, and almost unknown to himself his character degenerates, he loses his former simplicity and becomes an accomplished deceiver. He who was once so diffident now shrinks at nothing. 1. *He overcomes difficulties in the way of sin.* He was cool and thoughtful enough, at first, to see that he should run a risk, even with his blind father. (Verse 12.) But if he can surmount the fear of consequences, he cares not for the sin. 2. *He learns to act a falsehood.* He covered himself with skins that he might appear hairy like his brother. (Verse 16.) 3. *He proceeds to the direct falsehood.* (Verse 19.) And in this he scruples not to make an impious use of the name of God. (Verse 20.) When once a man has entered upon a course of evil, new difficulties arise and he is led into deeper guilt. 4. *He allows himself to be led into sin under the idea that he is carrying out the purpose of God.* He knew that the end he contemplated was according to the declared will of God, and therefore considered that any means used to attain it must be right. How many evils have been wrought in the course of human history under colour of devotion to some religious idea! But neither the wrath nor the craft of man can work out the righteousness of God.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 11, 12. Sin is often feared, not for itself but for its consequences.

Our Heavenly Father will certainly feel us, and better feel us; and we shall feel Him, too, in His fatherly corrections before He bless us.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 13. We cannot help regarding with a sort of admiration her lofty appreciation of that result which she sought, and her self-forgetful devotion to her beloved son; but it is as we feel the same sort of admiration for Lady Macbeth—with full consciousness of, and never forgetting, her crime.—(*Alford.*)

There is a touch of womanhood observable in her recklessness of personal consequences. So that only he might gain, she did not care: "upon me be thy curse, my son." And it is this which forces us, even while we most condemn, to compassionate. Throughout the whole of this revolting scene of deceit and fraud we never can forget that Rebekah was a mother; hence a certain interest in and sympathy with her are sustained. And we mark another feminine trait; her act sprang from devotion to a person rather than to a principle. A man's idolatry is for an idea, a woman's for a person. A man suffers for a monarchy, a woman for a king. A man's martyrdom differs from a woman's. Nay, even in their religion personality marks the one, attachment to an idea or principle the other. Woman adores God in His personality; man, in His attributes; at least, that is on the whole the characteristic difference. Here we have the idolatry of the woman, sacrificing husband, elder son, her own soul for an idolized person. For this was properly speaking, idolatry. Rebekah loved her son more than truth, that is more than God. This was to idolize; and hence Christ says, "If any man love father or mother more than Me, he is not worthy of Me."—(*Robertson.*)

There are persons who would romantically admire this devotion of Rebekah, and call it beautiful. To sacrifice all, even principle, for another; what higher proof of affection can there be? O miserable sophistry! the only true affection is that which is subordinate to a higher. It has been truly said that in those who love little love is a primary affection, a secondary one in those who love much. Be sure he cannot love another much, "who loves not honour more." For that higher affection sustains and elevates the lower one, casting round it a glory which mere personal feeling could never give. Compare, *e.g.*, Rebekah's love with that of Abraham for his son. Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son to duty; Rebekah sacrificed truth and duty to her son. Which loved a son the most? Which was the nobler love? Even as a question of permanence, which would last the longer? For consider what respect this guilty son and guilty mother could retain for each other after this! Would not love dwindle into shame, and love itself in recriminations? For affection will not long survive respect, however it may protract its life by effort.—(*Robertson.*)

Verse 14. Had his remonstrance arisen from an aversion to the evil, he would not so readily have yielded to her suggestions; but where temptation finds the heart fortified by nothing stronger than a regard to present consequences, it is very certain to prevail. Let us beware, however, how we are drawn by any authority whatever to the commission of evil. It will be of little avail to say, my adviser was my father or my mother; there is a plain path, from which no authority under heaven should induce us to swerve.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 15. Some suppose that this was a priestly robe worn by the elder son as priest of the household (Gen. xlix. 3). But this is not implied in the text, though the terms used in the Greek are such as are applied to the holy garments of the priesthood, and may here denote the desirable robes of the birthright-son, *kept in the tent* as of sacred value. And though Isaac could not see them, he could identify them by the feeling.—(*Jacobus.*)

Verses 16, 17. He suffers himself without remonstrance to be arrayed in the skin borrowed from a senseless animal, and the robes stolen from an unwitting brother. And led by the false fondness of a mother into the chamber which the seeming approach of death, as well as the solemn transaction then on hand, should have hallowed with an awful reverence of truth and righteousness,—he heaps lie upon lie with unscrupulous effrontery; abuses the simple confidence of the blind old man; and almost, if we may so speak, betraying his father with a kiss,—steals from him the birthright-blessing.—(*Candlish.*)

Verse 18. Jacob stands ready to do the mother's bidding in this work of deception. How his soul must have quaked in consequence of the fraud he was practising upon his aged father! He will find the way of transgressors to be hard. *Who art thou?* Is he not already detected? How his heart sinks at such a question.—(*Jacobus.*)

Verse 19. Here he utters three lies in a breath besides intituling God to that he did (Verse 20), so taking that revered name in vain. This was his sin, and he smarted for it to his dying day; for he had scarce a merry hour after this; but God followed him with one sorrow upon another, to teach him and us what an "evil and bitter thing sin is" (Jer. ii. 19), and how it ensnares us. The Scripture reckons a lie among monstrous sins (Rev. xxi. 8). Indeed, every lie is pernicious to ourselves or to others, or both; because flatly forbidden of God, and because it is against the order of nature, and for that "no lie is of the truth" (1 John ii. 21), but of the Devil, who began and still upholds his kingdom by lies. (John viii. 44.) Contrarily, God is truth, and His children are such as will not lie. (Isa. lxiii. 8; Rev. xiv. 5.)—(*Trapp.*)

To act and speak a falsehood requires boldness and a readiness to plunge into deeper sin, for one lie requires another to maintain it.

Verse 20. The answer is cunning but profane. Oh! how the man who undertakes to lie gets into deep water and mire, and must load his conscience with awful burdens of falsehood before he gets through! Here he must even bring in God Himself as having helped him to this result, when he knew that God must abhor the falsity. All this has come perhaps from a perverted conscience, supposing that because the birthright was his, of right, and his by Divine intent, therefore he could use wicked means to secure the end. As though God could not accomplish His own plan, or as though He was not to be trusted to do it.—(*Jacobus.*)

It is well to have God's Word on our side, but we should not attempt to fulfil that word by acting contrary to the known laws of righteousness.

Many are alarmed when they find that some known truth of nature is likely to contradict some truth of Scripture, as if God's Word were about to fail. They come forward with some scheme of their own to defend Divine truth, using all the arts and devices of special pleading. But God requires no man to act or speak wickedly for the vindication of His truth.

The answer intimates that his speedy success was owing to a particular Divine interference on his behalf! It is not easy to conceive a more daring piece of effrontery than this. It was bad enough to deal in so many gross equivocations, but to bring in the Lord God of his father in order to give them the appearance of truth was much worse, and what we should scarcely have expected but from one of the most depraved of men. But this was the natural result of a first wrong step. Jacob probably had no idea of going beyond a little stroke of dissimulation and fraud, yet here we find him treading upon the borders of absolute blasphemy, by making God Himself confederate in his sin!—*(Bush.)*

Verse 21. There is something about falsehood which, though it may silence, yet will not ordinarily satisfy. Isaac is yet suspicious, and therefore desires to feel his hands; and here the deception answered.—*(Fuller.)*

Oh, what a thrill of horror must this have sent through the deceiver's soul! *Luther* says, "I should probably have run away with horror and let the dish fall."—*(Jacobus.)*

Verse 22. Now the cunning device of his mother proves a success. If this precaution had lacked, the whole scheme would have failed. If, like Abraham, Rebekah had possessed a faith that would have even lifted the knife to slay her son at the call of duty, trusting in God to raise him up, how much happier would have been the whole company? All of them suffer for this wrong. How the deceiver is recompensed by deceits practised upon him in the beautiful coat of Joseph! (Gen. xxxvii).—*(Jacobus.)*

And now she wishes she could borrow Esau's tongue as well as his garments, that she might securely deceive all the senses of him, which had suffered himself to be more dangerously deceived with his affection. But this is past her remedy: her son must name himself Esau with the voice of Jacob. It is hard if our tongue do not betray what we are, in spite of our habit. This was enough to work Isaac to a suspicion, to an inquiry, not to an incredulity. He that is good of himself, will hardly believe evil of another; and will rather distrust his own senses than the fidelity of those he trusted. All the senses are set to examine; none sticketh at the judgment but the ear; to deceive that, Jacob must second his dissimulation with three lies at one breath: I am Esau; as thou badest me; my venison. One sin entertained fetcheth in another; and if it be forced to lodge alone, either departeth, or dieth. I love Jacob's blessing, but I hate his lie. I would not do that willingly which Jacob did weakly, upon condition of a blessing. *(Bp. Hall.)*

The hands, he thinks are Esau's; but still it is mysterious, for "the voice is Jacob's. Were it not for some such things as these, we might overlook the wisdom and goodness of God in affording so many marks by which to detect imposture, and distinguish man from man. Of all the multitudes of faces, voices, and figures in the world no two are perfectly alike; and if one sense fail us, the others are frequently improved.—*(Fuller.)*

Verse 23. The deed was done and could not be revoked. It was not done at this instant, but after eating the venison. (Verse 27.) We see how God works by various instruments; good and bad, and brings to pass His purposes by such strange links in the chain of events.—*(Jacobus.)*

Verse 24. Thus one sin entertained fetcheth in another; a lie especially, which being a blushful sin, is either denied by the liar who is ashamed to be taken with it, or else covered by another and another lie, as we see here in Jacob, who being once over shoes will be over boots too, but he will persuade his father that he is his very son Esau.—(*Trapp.*)

The father still again puts the question, and in a most pointed way, as if his suspicions were not yet utterly quieted. There seems to him something doubtful in this voice and in all the circumstances. He would put the question so pointedly as to admit of no evasion. It would seem that he knew Jacob's character for cunning; and when one has lost confidence—when he has forfeited his character for straightforward and honest and truthful conduct—it is hard to put away doubt, and every little item stirs the suspicion afresh.—(*Jacobus.*)

Here was nothing but counterfeiting; a feigned person, a feigned name, feigned venison, a feigned answer, and yet behold a true blessing; but to the man, not to the means. Those were so unsound, that Jacob himself doth more fear their curse, than hope for their success. Isaac was now both simple and old; yet if he had perceived the fraud, Jacob had been more sure of a curse, than he could be sure that he should not be perceived.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 25-29.

ISAAC BLESSING JACOB.

The father is at length satisfied, and expresses his paternal affection by a kiss. He accepts his son's duty and favour in the providing and preparation of the last solemn meal. He then proceeds to bless his son.

I. With temporal blessings. 1. *A fertile soil.* To him was promised "the fatness of the earth." This was fulfilled in the exceeding fertility of the Holy Land. (Deut. viii. 7–9.) This natural richness of the soil was to be replenished by "the dew of heaven," one blessing answering to and requiring the other. There is a ministry of service and of mediation throughout all parts of God's works, each department of nature deriving some aid and influence from every other. Hence it is that when God promises one blessing He intends to impart every other blessing which is necessary to complete it. The fatness of the earth shall be answered by the dew of heaven. 2. *Abundance of provision.* "Corn and wine." These imply all the rest. All things are promised which are necessary to the sustenance and enjoyment of life. 3. *Political pre-eminence.* "Let people serve thee." Here is a promise of universal dominion—lordship over foreign nations. It is also promised that Jacob shall preserve pre-eminence among his own kindred. "Be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee." This was God's election, that "the elder should serve the younger." The greatness and importance of the nation were to be developed throughout the line of Isaac's family.

II. With spiritual blessings. "Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee." Though not expressed in such clear and full terms, this is virtually the same promise as that made to Abraham. The blessing conveyed to Jacob was—1. *The channel of spiritual blessing to mankind.* The seed of Abraham was to proceed throughout history along this chosen line, and in that seed all the families of the earth were to be blessed. "Salvation is of the Jews," *i.e.*, it must spring forth from them. Also, this blessing was to be—2. *A test of character.* A curse was pronounced upon those who should curse Jacob. All who should reject and despise the salvation provided through the seed of Abraham would bring condemnation upon themselves. The posit men take up with regard to the salvation offered through the Messiah is a test of spiritual character. Christ was "set for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel." And by men's treatment of Him and His claims "the thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed." The whole of the blessing here promised to Jacob is only realised fully in Christ. The possession of a fertile land, the expansion of the chosen family into a great nation, and the subjugation of other peoples are the prominent features in the promise made to Abraham, and they prefigured the glory and dominion which belong to Messiah's kingdom.

> "The beam that shines from Zion's hill
> Will lighten every land;
> The King who reigns on Zion's throne
> Shall all the world command."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 25, 26. The kiss was a sign of affection and reverence (Gen. xlviii. 10; Ps. ii. 12). His thus coming in contact with his father's person would also afford a proof to the senses, from the peculiar scent of his apparel, in favour of his alleged identity. But it was deceiving, if not betraying, his father with a kiss.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 27. The smell in this case was probably occasioned by the aromatic herbs which had been laid up with the clothes, both to prevent their being fretted by the moths, and to give them an agreeable odour. The Orientals are proverbially fond of perfumes. They sprinkle their clothes with scented oils or waters, or fumigate them with the incense from odoriferous woods, or carry such woods or fragrant herbs in a small bag or sewed up in their clothes.—(*Bush.*)

It is not common to *salute*, as in England, they simply *smell* each other; and it is said that some people know their children by the smell. The crown of the head is the principle place for *smelling*. Of an amiable man it is said, "How sweet is the smell of that man! the smell of his goodness is universal!"—(*Roberts.*)

Isaac believes, and blessed the younger son in the garments of the elder. If our heavenly father smell upon our backs the savour of our elder brother's robes, we cannot depart from him unblessed.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

Verse 28. It is probable that the language of the whole verses has a sense beyond that of the simple letter. "The dew of heaven" and the "fatness of the earth" shadow out to us the doctrines of the Gospel and the graces of the Holy Spirit shed forth upon men; in fine, the whole inventory of spiritual mercies which flow to the holy seed in virtue of the covenant made with Abraham. This is confirmed by the drift of the following among other passages—Deut. xxxii. 2; Hos. xiv. 6, 7; Isaiah xxv. 6; viii. 8. Indeed, so clearly analogous is this in point of phraseology to the blessing pronounced upon Esau, that, unless we would make them almost equivalent, it would seem imperative upon us to affix some sense to the words over and above that conveyed by the mere letter.—(*Bush.*)

For Jacob the blessing is, "God give thee of the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth." Here the earth is postponed to heaven; the blessings of this world to those of the world to come; the gifts of nature to the gifts of grace. But for Esau the blessing is, "Behold thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and the dew of heaven from above." Here heaven is postponed to earth, the spiritual to the natural, the blessings of salvation to temporal prosperity.

Verse 29. This is the only part of the blessing that directly comprises spiritual things, and even this is of a peculiar form. It is to be recollected that it was Isaac's intention to bless Esau, and he may have felt that Esau, after all, was not to be the progenitor of the holy seed. Hence the form of expression is vague enough to apply to temporal things, and yet sufficiently comprehensive to embrace the infliction of the ban of sin, and the diffusion of the blessing of salvation by means of the holy seed.—*(Murphy.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 30–40.

Esau Disappointed of His Blessing.

I. He is overwhelmed by a heart-rending sorrow. He had procured the savoury meat, brought it to his father, and prepared himself to receive the coveted blessing. When he found that his brother had already secured that blessing by treachery, "he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father." His grief is so sudden and overwhelming that he cannot take in all the sad facts of his position. He vaguely hopes that there is some way of escape from the difficulty. Surely some blessing, at all risks, must be reserved for him!

II. He refers his wrongs to their true author. His brother Jacob, who had taken away his birthright, had now taken away his blessing. (Verse 36.) It is true that Esau had freely bartered his birthright for pottage, still the transaction was wrong, for Jacob took advantage of his brother's necessity. Poor Esau felt that he was the victim of a well-known and practiced deceiver.

III. He pleads pathetically with his father. "And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?" He felt that there must be some help for him—some depths of resource in his father's heart which were still untried. This feeling is almost akin to that faith which is not daunted by impossibilities, and even hopes against hope.

IV. He is contented with an inferior blessing. The superior blessing had already been pronounced upon another, and was irrevocable. "Yea, and he shall be blessed," said his father. Esau cannot now expect the highest blessing. He might have the crumbs from the table, but not the children's bread. The blessing pronounced upon him by his father included many things good in themselves, but the highest and best things are absent. He was promised increase, prosperity, pre-eminence, and renown in war. But with this should be mingled the bitter portion of servitude to his brother. He would sometimes get the dominion and break the yoke from off his neck, but he would have only a brief victory, and must return again to subjection. (Verses 39, 40.) At best, the portion of Esau can only be described as God's blessings without God. Nothing of heaven enters into it.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 30–32. Esau prepared the dish and brought it to his father, and claimed the blessing in very similar terms to those used by Jacob. Esau must have remembered how he had parted with his birthright to Jacob, and therefore in his conscience he could not be entirely unprepared for the discovery of his loss. Esau is too late. Isaac must have been smitten with a sense of his own sin in his carnal preference for Esau, contrary to all indications of the Divine pleasure. He felt, too, that this patriarchal blessing was as the Divine direction and not from any personal preference, and he found himself strangely controlled and overruled by the Divine hand.—*(Jacobus.)*

Verse 33. His emotions were absolutely overwhelming. On the one hand, he could not but feel a degree of just indignation in view of the imposition which had been practised upon him, especially when he remembered the precautions he had taken against being thus deceived; yet, on the other, a moment's reflection would convince him that the transfer of the blessing must have been "of the Lord," and, consequently, that he had been all along acting against His will in trying to have it otherwise. Two such considerations rushing on his mind at once, like two impetuous counter-currents coming together, sufficiently account for his feelings, especially when we add his consciousness of the irrevocable nature of the blessing, and the momentous consequences annexed to it. But while he resents the subtlety of Jacob, and the unkindness of Rebekah, he acknowledges and acquiesces in the will of God. The blessing which he had unwittingly pronounced, and which he knows to be irrevocable, he deliberately and solemnly confirms: "I have blessed him, yea, and he shall be blessed." His feelings would, perhaps, not be inaptly expressed by the language of Balaam, "God is not a man that he should lie," etc. (Num. xxxiii. 19, 20). Hence the Apostle tells us, that "Esau found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears"—that is, he found no place for repentance, or change of purpose, in his father, He could not prevail upon him to reverse the word that had proceeded from his lips.—(*Bush.*)

If anything can excuse a departure from a promise, Isaac might have been excused in this case; for in truth he did not promise to Jacob, though Jacob stood before him. He honestly thought that he was speaking to his first-born; and yet, perhaps partly taught to be punctiliously scrupulous by the rebuke he had received in early life from Abimilech, partly feeling that he had been but an instrument in God's hands, he felt that a mysterious and irrevocable sacredness belonged to his word once passed; and said, "Yea, and he shall be blessed." Jesuitism amongst us has begun to tamper with the sacredness of a promise. Men change their creed, and fancy themselves absolved from past promises; the member of the Church of Rome is no longer bound to do what the member of the Church of England stipulated. Just as well might the king refuse to perform the promises or pay the debts of the prince whom he once was. Therefore, let us ponder over such texts as these. Be careful and cautious of pledging yourself to anything; but the money you have once promised, the offer you have once made is irrevocable, it is no longer yours, it is passed from you as much as if it had been given.—(*Robertson.*)

Though the words and actions of the parties in this transaction were built upon a falsehood, yet a true blessing was obtained. Through all the evil purposes and schemes of men God works out his great designs.

He trembled from the vivid apprehension suddenly flashing across his mind of the Lord's presence and the Lord's power, and not from anger, or anxiety, or terror, or blank dismay; though such emotions might well agitate his bosom. He had a startling sense of the interposition of that God without whose warrant he had set himself to perform the solemn prophetic act that was to close his patriarchal ministry, and against whose open and revealed will he had been, so far as his own intention could go, actually performing it. His whole frame receives a shock. The scales fell from his eyes—the eyes of his soul that had been blinded even more than the dim eyes of his body. He awakens as out of a sleep, and feels that surely the Lord is here, though he knew it not.—(*Candlish.*)

Verse 34. When Esau sold his birthright he did not then know what he had lost, but now it is all brought home to him. Those who choose the present world for their portion and spurn the offer of eternal life do not know what they lose, but the time must come when they shall know to their sorrow.

Vengeance wakes up suddenly to startle men when the sin which brought it has been long forgotten.

Why did he not rather weep to his brother for the pottage than to Isaac for a blessing? If he had not then sold, he had not needed now to buy. It is just with God to deny us those favours which we were careless in keeping, and which we undervalued in enjoying. How happy a thing is it to know the seasons of grace, and not to neglect them! How desperate to have known and neglected them! These tears are both late and false.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

In the midst of all his regrets there was no real contrition, no godly sorrow at heart, but only disappointment and vexation at his loss. We find at the time no self-condemnation, no confession of his sin; but only a severe accusation of his brother, as if he only were to blame for what had happened. Neither does he give any evidence of having been a true penitent afterwards, for his heart was evidently full of rage and enmity towards his brother, under the influence of which he determines, on a fit opportunity, to put an end to his life. All this shows a state of mind at the widest possible remove from sincere repentance.—(*Bush.*)

He cried not for his sin in selling the birthright, but for his loss in missing the blessing; though having sold the birthright, he had no right to the blessing. This is the guise of the ungoldly. He cries, *Perrii*, not *Peccavi*. If he "howl" upon his bed (Hos. vii. 14), it is for corn and oil, as a dog tied up howls for his dinner. It never troubles him that a good God is offended, which to an honest heart is the prime cause of the greatest sorrow.—(*Trapp.*)

The sinner cut off from the privileges of the Church can yet claim God as his Father. Repentance and prayer, and a way of return are still left to him.

Verses 35, 36. It cannot be denied that there was some ground for the reflections thus cast upon Jacob. He had, indeed, acted the part of a supplanter in a way altogether unjustifiable; still the statement was exaggerated. Esau was not warranted in saying, "He took away my birthright," as though he robbed him of it, for the surrender was his own voluntary act. He parted with it because he practically depised it. But it is no unusual thing for men to act as if accusing others were the most effectual mode of justifying themselves.—(*Bush.*)

"Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?" is a prayer which those who have despised their birthright, and justly forfeited it, may still address to the Infinite Father.

Verse 37. Isaac, in using this language is not to be considered as giving vent to a self-sufficient or self-complacent spirit, it is the ordinary prophetic style. Men speaking by inspiration are often said to do that which they merely announce shall be done.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 38. These words, taken by themselves, without reference to the character of him who spoke them, are neither good nor evil. Had Esau only meant this: God has many blessings, of various kinds; and looking round the circle of my resources I perceive a principle of compensation, so that what I lose in one department I gain in some other; I will be content to take a second blessing when I cannot have the first: Esau would have said nothing which was not praiseworthy and religious. He would only have expressed what the Syro-Phœnician woman did, who observed that though in this world some have the advantages of children, whereas others are as little favoured as dogs, yet that the dogs have the compensatory crumbs. Superior advantages do not carry salvation nor moral superiority with them, necessarily; nor do inferior ones carry reprobation. But it was not in this spirit at all that Esau spoke. His was the complaining spirit of the man who repines because others are more favoured than he, the spirit of the elder son in the parable, "thou never gavest *me* a kid." *This* character transformed outward disadvantages into a real curse. For, again I say, disadvantages are in themselves only a means to more lustrous excellence. But if to inferior talents we add sloth, and to poverty envy and discontent, and to weakened health querulousness, then we have indeed ourselves converted non-election into reprobation; and we are doubly cursed, cursed by inward as well as outward inferiority—(*Robertson.*)

Verse 39, 40. At length in reply to the weeping suppliant, he bestows upon him a characteristic blessing. The preposition is the same as in the blessing of Jacob. But there, after a verb of giving it had a partitive sense; here, after a noun of place, it denotes distance or separation (for example, Prov. xx. 3). The pastoral life has been distasteful to Esau, and so it shall be with his race. The land of Edom was accordingly a comparative wilderness (Mal. i. 3).—(*Murphy.*)

In this double blessing, of course the destinies of Israel and Edom are prefigured rather than the personal history of Jacob and Esau. For the predicted liberty of Edom, the breaking the yoke off the neck, did not take place till the reign of Jehoram, long after Esau's death (2 Kings, viii. 22). So that when it is written, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," the selection of nations to outward privileges is meant, not the irrespective election of individuals to eternal life. In these blessings we have the principle of prophecy. We cannot suppose that the Jacob here spoken of as blessed was unmixedly good, nor the Esau unmixedly evil. Nor can we imagine that idolatrous Israel was that in which all the promises of God found their end, or that Edom was the nation on whom the curse of God fell unmixed with any blessing. Prophecy takes individuals and nations as representations for the time being of principles which they only partially represent. They are the basis or substratum of an idea. For instance, Jacob, or Israel, represents the principle of good, the Church of God, the triumphant and blessed principle. To that, the typical Israel, the promises are made; to the literal Jacob or Israel, only as the type of this and so far as the nation actually was what it stood for. Esau is the worldly man, representing for the time the world. To that the rejection belongs, to the literal Esau only so far as is he that. In prophecies therefore, such as these, we are dealing much more with the ideas of which such persons and nations are the type than with the persons or nations themselves.—(*Robertson.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 41–46.

ESAU'S RESENTMENT.

I. It was carnal. There is a proper resentment which comes of righteous indignation against evil and wrong. It is a noble sentiment in us when we stand up for truth and the law of God, as against the errors and oppositions of unrighteous men. But Esau did not rise to this moral nobility. He only regarded his own personal interests. It was something done against himself that he resented, and not something done against the interests of God's righteous rule in the world. Yet there was much apparent justice on Esau's side of this conflict. He was the acknowledged firstborn; he had obeyed the last request of his father. Now there was a bold and heartless attempt to deprive him of his proper rights, against common usage and natural law. His right was unquestionable, and we may well suppose that any jury of his fellow men would support him in the assertion of it. He had his father's real intention on his side, which might be supposed to cancel any foolish deed he had done in a moment of temptation. Why then should he patiently endure the opposition of his brother? But his conduct was altogether selfish. He had no large and generous views, no regard for the interests of God's kingdom in the world. He was not seeking true repentance, for then he would have humbled himself for his sin. He would have humbly tried to know what the will of the Lord was, and have been willing to accept a share in the covenant blessing on any terms. The Old Testament regards all human conduct as having relation to the will and pleasure of God, and to be hereby estimated. In this light Esau's conduct must be considered as carnal, and not spiritual.

II. It was overruled for good. Esau's enmity against his brother had the effect of promoting the further separation between the church and the world. Jacob is preserved from alliance by marriage with the ungodly. He is put in the way of contracting a better marriage than Esau, such as would ensure the purity and nobility of the chosen race. Rebekah contrives not only to save Jacob from his brother's anger, but also to save him from falling into the same sin of an ungodly marriage. Thus human passions, and the conflict of private and selfish interests are made to work out the designs of God.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 41. Whatever feeling of commiseration or sympathy we may hitherto have cherished for Esau in seeing him supplanted by the subtlety of Jacob, it is all banished from our bosoms when we behold him inwardly cherishing the most malignant passions, and cooly anticipating the time when he can imbue his hands in the blood of his brother. His guilt in this assumes an awfully atrocious character. His hatred was of the same nature as that of Cain towards Abel, and of Saul towards David, being directed against him, principally on account of his having been a special object of the Divine favour. Under these circumstances, the attempt to take Jacob's life was virtually waging war with the high purposes of heaven, and an attempt to frustrate the decree of God by a stroke of his sword. The same spirit of hatred seems to have been perpetuated in his posterity against the seed of Jacob. As nothing but the death of Jacob could comfort Esau, so nothing could satisfy his descendants but to see Jerusalem "razed to its foundations."—(*Bush.*)

He who cannot feel indignant at some kinds of wrong has not the mind of Christ. Remember the words with which He blighted Pharasaism, words not spoken for effect, but syllables of downright, genuine anger. Very different from this was Esau's resentment. Anger in him had passed into malice; private wrong had been brooded on till it had become revenge, deliberate and planned vindictiveness. Turn once more to the life of the Redeemer; you find scarcely a trace of resentment for injury done merely to himself. Wrong and injustice he felt; but that it was done to Him added nothing to His feeling.—(*Robertson.*)

Jacob was held back by respect for his father, but he had no consideration for the grief of his mother.

Verse 42. The unhappy mother begins to reap according as she had sown.

The safety of her favourite can only be secured at the price of his banishment. We see from this that though their imposition succeeded, yet it was a success that embittered the whole life both of Jacob and his parents. Rebekah, the contriver of the fraud, was deprived of her favourite son, probably for the rest of her days. Instead of the elder serving the younger, Jacob was now a banished stranger, a wandering fugitive, in continual terror of his enraged brother. The retributive justice of Heaven is seen pursuing him at every step. 1. He who had imposed upon his father is himself imposed upon by his uncle in the circumstances of his marriage. 2. The continual jealousies and hatred between his wives must have reminded him of his own want of paternal affection. 3. Continual feuds prevailed among his own children. 4. He was himself the dupe of an imposture more successful even than that by which he had deceived his father. Joseph, his beloved son, was sold by his brethren, and stated to have been slain. The rest of the life of Jacob was signalised by scenes of domestic trouble and vexation, which had their origin in the unhappy step we are now considering.—(*Bush.*)

Verses 43, 44. These "few days" proved to be a period of twenty years. How little we can do towards the disposal of the times and events of our life!

Verse 45. Rebekah's repentance is changed into an atonement by the heroic valour of her faith.—(*Lange.*)

But why does Rebekah fear a twofold bereavement? It is indeed possible that she may have apprehended that a murderous attack from Esau upon his brother might arouse him in self-defence, so that it should be only at the expense of the aggressor's life that he should lose his own. But a more probable explanation is the following:—If Esau had killed Jacob, he would have been liable either to have been punished with death, according to the law (Gen. ix. 6), or to have been driven into exile like Cain, where he would have been virtually lost to her for ever.—(*Bush.*)

And he forgets what thou hast done to him. With this she both acknowledges Jacob's guilt, and betrays a precise knowledge of Esau's character. Let us not despair too soon of men. Are there not twelve hours during the day? The great fury and fiery indignation pass away with time.—(*Luther.*)

Verse 46. It would appear that Rebekah was here framing an excuse for Jacob's departure, and concealing the true cause. It was expedient before Jacob's departure to obtain his father's concurrence. But in order to do this, she passes over the true reason of the proposed journey in silence, knowing that he, as well as herself, had been grieved by Esau's wives, she now pretends to fear that Jacob may form a similar connection, and makes this the ostensible reason why he should go immediately to Padan-aram—viz., that he might take a wife from among their relations in that country. She does not propose it directly, but merely in the form of a bitter complaint of the conduct of Esau's wives. But this policy completely answered its end, as is clear from the next chapter.—(*Bush.*)

How sagacious this pious woman: she conceals to her husband the great misfortune and affliction existing in the house, so as not to bring sorrow upon Isaac in his old age.—(*Luther.*)

IMPORTANT REFLECTIONS SUGGESTED BY THE FOREGOING NARRATIVE.

I. The history furnishes an admonitory lesson to parents. Parents complain of their children when, perhaps, the fault is to be traced mainly to themselves. They have indulged an early partiality, founded upon no just reasons, which has been productive on both sides of the worst effects. Let them guard with anxious vigilance against the symptoms of a week favouritism towards their children. A wise Providence often points out the sin in the punishment, and teaches parents discretion in the discharge of their duties by setting before their eyes the bad effects which flow from the want of it.

II. We may learn from this history not to make the supposed designs of God the rule of our conduct. We say, "supposed designs," because as to us they can be only supposed. It may please God to foretell future events, but it is not, therefore our duty by crooked means to bring them to pass. God does not give prophecy for a rule of action. He will accomplish His own purposes in His own way. We are to follow what is fair and just, and honourable, and leave the consequences to God.

III. We are reminded that the way to success and to prosperity in our undertakings is often not that which appears the shortest, or even the surest. Jacob was, indeed, for the time being, successful in his fraudulent device; but what fruits had he of his triumph? He sowed the wind, and reaped the whirlwind. Soon was he forced to fly from his brother's wrath, and years of trouble followed his departure from the parental mansion. Had he permitted God to accomplish His declaration in His own way; had his conduct towards his brother been kind and affectionate, and free from guile, we cannot doubt that his history would have been far different. The true source of prosperity is the blessing of God, and this cannot be counted upon except in strict adherence to the principles of rectitude. A man is exposed to temptation; some great advantage offers itself; a little art or deceit in supplanting another is thought indispensable; excuses are not wanting to justify the act. But what, in general, is the result? Either his arts recoil against himself, and he is utterly disappointed of his aim; or if he apparently succeeds, his success is rather a curse than a blessing. Our highest wisdom and our surest safety lie in the course of plain, simple, undeviating integrity.

IV. We are taught that regret is often unavailing to restore an offender to the privileges of innocence. Esau, having sold the birthright and lost the blessing, discovered his error too late. The blessing once gone was gone for ever; and tears, and prayers, and exclamations were in vain employed to recover it. Let us learn, then, that however momentous the consequences depending upon a single wrong step, they may be irretrievable. Regret, however bitter; entreaty, however urgent, may come too late. In vain shall we look for our former peace of mind, the sweets of conscious innocence, and the fruits of pleasing hope. We may seek for them with tears, but they will not be found. Let us not by yielding to temptation, cast away our confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.—(*Bush.*)

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Critical Notes.—3. **A multitude of people.]** Heb. "To a congregation of peoples." This is the same word which was afterwards applied to the assembled people of God. It corresponds to the ἐκκλησία.—5. **Bethuel, the Syrian.]** Not because he was of the race of Aram, the son of Shem, but because he was a dweller in that land.—9. **Then went Esau unto Ishmael.]** To his family, and not to Ishmael himself, who had been dead for fourteen years. (Gen. xxv. 17.)—11. **And he lighted upon a certain place.]** "The term means *he fell upon the place*, as the providential stopping-place incidentally coming upon it, or coming up to it, as the lodging place for the night. This place was about forty-eight miles from Beersheba, and eight miles north of Jerusalem, near the town of Bethel, and is defined as *the place* from its being so well known in the history." (*Jacobus.*)—**12. A ladder.]** "Whether it was the vision of a common ladder or flight of steps, or whether, as some suppose, it was a pile of mountain terraces, matters little. The flight of steps hewn in the rocky sides of the mountain near Tyre, on the edge of the Mediterranean, is called "*the ladder of Tyre.*" (*Jacobus.*)—**17. How dreadful is this place!]** Heb. "***Awe-inspiring***, commonly rendered *fearful* or *terrible.*" (*Jacobus.*)—**18. Took the stone.]** A collective singular for "stones," as it appears from verse 11 that there was more than one of them. **Poured oil upon the top of it.]** This was an act of consecration to God.—**19. And he called the name of that place Beth-el.]** This name means the house of God, and was not now for the first time given. Abraham also worshipped God here, and found that the place already bore this name. (Gen. xii. 8; xiii. 3; xxv. 30.) *But the name of that city was called Luz at the first.* "The city in the immediate neighbourhood was, at the time, called Luz. The descendants of the patriarchs transferred the name of Bethel to that city. The Canaanites, not caring for this, continued to call it *Luz*, which was retained till Joshua occupied the land. Bethel, the holy *place*, is distinguished from *Luz*, the city. (*Kurtz*).—**20. If God will be with me, and keep me in the way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on.]** "This is not making any condition with God, for this is only a recital of the promise, and is more properly rendered *since—inasmuch as.* It expresses no doubt or contingency. 'I, *if* I be lifted up,' means '*as surely as I shall be* lifted up.' And so here—as surely as God will be with me (has promised to be)." (*Jacobus.*)—**21. Then shall the Lord be my God.]** "And (so surely as) he shall be my God, *my covenant God*—the same as He has been to Abraham and Isaac, *so shall this stone.*" (*Hengstenberg.*)—**22. God's house.** "A place sacred to the memory of God's presence—as a place where He manifested Himself. The apostle calls 'the Church the pillar and ground of the truth,' alluding to this passage." (1 Tim. iii. 14.) (*Jacobus.*)—**22. I will surely give the tenth unto thee.]** After the example of Abraham. (Gen. xiv. 20.) **The number *ten*, being the last of the cardinal numbers, expresses the idea of perfection.**

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–5.

THE BEGINNING OF JACOB'S PILGRIMAGE.

Up to this time Jacob dwelt at home with his father. He had been the plain, domestic man, dwelling in tents. Now he is obliged to become a wanderer, and to face unknown fortunes.

I. The causes which led him to undertake his pilgrimage. 1. *His brother's anger.* He must flee away from the rage of Esau. The wrong he had done is now visited upon him. He loses peace of mind, sense of security, and his brother's love. Thus he is made to reap the bitter fruits of unrighteousness. 2. *His mother's counsel.* Rebekah invents an ingenious excuse for Jacob's sudden departure from his house. She professes to be concerned lest he should form an alliance in marriage with the children of Heth, as his brother Esau had done. (Gen. xxvii. 46.) She probably intended, at first, only to arrange for a brief absence, believing that Esau's temper would soon cool. This showed a deep knowledge of human nature; for the fiercer the rage, the sooner it spends itself. Rebekah was also prompted by a religious motive. She would save Jacob from the sin into which Esau had fallen; and as she knew that the purpose of God was on the side of her ambition she had faith in that great future which was in store for Isaac. Thus it was adversity that set Jacob on this journey. God by this means was wakening him up to a sense of his own evil and weakness, so that he might learn to find the true refuge and home of his soul. Thus affliction conducts us by new ways in our pilgrimage, so that our extremity may be God's opportunity to help and deliver us.

II. The Divine provisions for his pilgrimage. 1. *The peculiar blessing of the chosen seed.* That blessing of Abraham which came from God Almighty is now reversed and secured to Jacob. God had the right to choose the family from whom salvation was to come, and had the power to accomplish the purposes of His will. Jacob was chosen as the covenant son. The original blessing of the father of the faithful was conveyed to him,— a numerous offspring, which was to be God's family,—the church which is the home of God's people. Thus Jacob was virtually provided with the hope of salvation. 2. *The ministry of man in conveying this blessing.* Isaac became at last alive to the real destiny of Jacob. He submits to the will of God after he had so long resisted it. In order that the provisions of the blessings might be carried out, he gives Jacob advice regarding his marriage. Thus furnished, Jacob set out on his pilgrimage. And so we, too, need for our pilgrimage an interest in God's covenant blessings in Christ, and the ministry of man as the means of bringing us into acquaintance with it.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Isaac, though he survived this event forty-three years, has now passed from the scene, and Jacob henceforth takes his place in the patriarchal history. Abraham is the man of active faith, Isaac is the man of passive submission, and Jacob is the man of struggling trial.—(*Jacobus.*)

The account here given of his "calling, blessing, and charging" him, is very much to his honour. The first of these terms implies his reconciliation to him; the second, his satisfaction in what had been done before without design; and the last, his concern that he should act in a manner worthy of the blessing which he had received. How differently do things issue in different minds. Esau, as well as Isaac, was "exceedingly" affected by what had lately occurred: but the bitter cry "of the one issued in a settled hatred," while the "trembling" of the other brought him to a right mind. He had been thinking matters over since, and the more he thought of them, the more satisfied he was that it was the will of God; and that all his private partialities should give place to it.—(*Fuller.*)

Isaac, at length, yields himself to God. He had become satisfied that Jacob was the real object of the blessing.

Verse 2. Jacob was no sooner blest, than he was banished. So our Saviour was no sooner out of the water of baptism, and had heard, "This is my beloved Son," etc., but He was presently in the fire of temptation, and heard, "If thou be the Son of God," etc. (Matt. iii., iv.) When Hezekiah had set all in good order (2 Chron. xxxi.), then up came Sennacherib with an army (Chap. xxxii. 1.) God puts His people to it; and often, after sweetest feelings.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 3. The blessing of Jacob is the blessing of the Church of God, which is composed of all people of every kingdom, nation, and tongue.

Many a time have the Jews been carried away captive. Hundreds of thousands perished in the war of Titus, and in the middle ages multitudes were destroyed by persecution. Yet the Jew is to be found in all lands, and amongst every people. Such is the God-given energy, and the inextinguishable life of this marvellous Hebrew race. "Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?" (Numbers xxiii. 10.)

The Church is a community of nations, typified already by the theocracy.—(*Lange.*)

Verse 4. The second item in the covenant blessing is here the inheritance of the promised land—never overlooked—very important in God's view, as showing His hand in secular and national history. "The blessing of Abraham," with all its privileges was the patriarchal covenant blessing, comprising rich spiritual benedictions and benefits.—(*Jacobus.*)

Here he is made "heir of the blessing," as are also all true Christians (1 Peter, iii. 9). Cæsar, when he was sad, said to himself, *Cogita te esse Cæsarem* — "think that thou art Cæsar;" so, think thou art an heir of heaven, and be sad if thou canst.—(*Trapp*).

Verse 5. The quiet, sedate, home-loving Jacob, becomes a courageous pilgrim. It was adversity that woke up his energies, and put him in the way of God's blessing.

Persecution is overruled by God for good. It leads to a more decided separation of the Church from the surrounding idolatrous world. Thus the little flock to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom, are often the better for the very rage of the wolves seeking to devour them. They are hereby brought nearer to the Good Shepherd and to one another, while they are more thoroughly sifted, tried, and purified, so as to be separated from the evil that is in the world, and consecrated as a peculiar people to the Lord.—(*Candlish.*)

Isaac sent away Jacob with his staff only (Gen. xxxii. 10), and to "serve for a wife (Hos. xii. 12). It was otherwise, when a wife was provided for Isaac. But Jacob went as privately as he could; "he fled into Syria," probably that his brother Esau might not know of his journey, and wait him a shrewd turn by the way.—(*Trapp.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6–9.

Esau, the Type of Worldliness and Hypocrisy.

Esau attempts to repair the error into which he had fallen by marrying into a heathen family, to the great grief of his parents. He knew that his father had charged Jacob to avoid such a wicked course (ver. 1), and that upon this point he would be most accessible. Therefore he resolves to marry into his father's family. He considered that this would pass with his father as a noble act of filial devotion. But all this is only the wordly policy of the hypocrite. He feigns repentance in order to secure some temporal good or comfort for himself. He is, therefore, the type of hypocrisy and worldliness in religion. He was certainly, all this time, a hypocrite, for he nursed hatred in his heart against his brother, and only waited opportunity to carry out his evil purpose. Such are the characteristics of the religion of hypocrites of all times. What was the case with Esau?

I. His conduct was mercenary. He only cared to win back the temporal advantages of the blessing by any means, even by the pretence of a pious devotion to the wishes of his father. So hypocrites only study their own worldly interests. They are concerned with religion only so far as it will promote these. They are like the multitude who were ready to follow Christ as long as He offered easy blessings, but deserted Him the moment their advantage seemed to lie in another direction. Such men claim to follow Christ as long as they think that their worldly prosperity is promoted by such a profession, but they will barter Him for a consideration when the temptation is strong enough. "What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you."

II. His conduct was one-sided. Esau wanted to secure the favour and blessing of his father while, at the same time, he was cherishing deadly hatred towards his brother. He wanted to enjoy all the benefits of piety while he wilfully neglected some of its obligations. There are those who would like to secure the favour of God and some of the advantages of religion, while at the same time, they have no respect to *all* God's commandments. They wickedly assume a privilege in regard to certain sins. They are willing to serve

God in many respects, if only an exception can be made in favour of some particular sin. Such men do not submit themselves to God. They are strangers to the spirit of faith and obedience, and therefore they are not righteous. The servants of God cannot be allowed to choose their own paths of duty by a principle of selfish interest.

III. His conduct was framed by the principle of imitation. Esau presumed to imitate the conduct of his brother, but he was ignorant of the deep grounds upon which it rested. There are many hypocrites in this sense, that they are imitators of the outward conduct and signs of devotion of godly men. Such men deceive *themselves.* They do not intend to be guilty of a pretence; but are merely imitators of what pious men do and say, though, all the while, they are ignorant of the deep reasons upon which these things are founded. Esau, then, is a type of the worldly man, and of hypocrites who wish to claim some of the advantages of religion without giving themselves up entirely to God, and also of those who imitate the conduct of the truly pious without their deep convictions and felt satisfaction in God. The result of Esau's conduct is a warning to all whom it may concern. His scheme did not succeed, and he only was landed in worse difficulties. He marries into a family quite outside the pale of the covenant, one which was outlawed and alienated, where even now the pure worship of God had already degenerated. So the hope of the hypocrite shall perish.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 6. But he was ever too late, and therefore what he did was to little purpose. An over-late sight is good neither in piety nor policy. How many have we known taken away in their offers and essays, before they had prepared their hearts to cleave to God.—(*Trapp.*)

Verses 7–9. See what awkward work is made when men go about to please others, and promote their worldly interests by imitating that in which they have no delight. Ignorance and error mark every step they take. Esau was in no need of a wife. His parents would not be gratified by his connection with the apostate family of Ishmael. In short, he is out in all his calculations; nor can he discover the principles which influence those who fear the Lord. Thus have we often seen men try to imitate religious people for the sake of gaining esteem, or some way promoting their selfish ends; but instead of succeeding they have commonly made bad worse. That which to a right mind is as plain as the most public highway, to a mind perverted shall appear full of difficulties. "The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city." (Eccles. x. 15.)—(*Fuller.*)

Hypocrites will needs do something that they may seem to be somebody. But, for the want of an inward principle, they do nothing well. They cement one error with another, as Esau here; and as Herod prevents perjury by murder, thus while they shun the sands they fall into the whirlpool.—(*Trapp.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 10–22.

JACOB'S VISION.

I. It was vouchsafed to him in a time of inward and outward trouble. The sense of his sin is now lying hard upon Jacob. He had been guilty of deceit, had incurred the anger of his brother, and disturbed the peace of his father's household. He had claimed his title to the blessing in a self-righteous frame of mind, and gained admission for that claim by unrighteous means. As long as he is supported by his mother's sympathy and by the excitement of success, he feels but little sense of shame and sorrow. But this is the time with him of outward trouble; and the thought of his sin is forced upon him, and he has also inward trouble. He who had never left his father's house before, for whom everything was provided, now becomes a wanderer. He is left all alone on an untried journey. He set out in the sunshine, and as he was young and vigorous he could keep his spirits from sinking under despondency. But now night comes on. He has no tent, no pillow. He is alone with himself, all seems desolate around him, and he is like one forsaken. A sense of sin rests upon his soul, and a vague dread of unknown terrors. It was thus when everything in life seemed against him that this vision was vouchsafed.

II. It satisfied all his necessities. I. *His spiritual necessities.* (1) ***It assured him that heaven and earth were not separated by an impassable gulf.*** Sin has created a distance between God and man. Men feel this when they think at all upon the subject. They think upon the righteous character, and sadly feel that they are not so with God. Jacob felt now that he had sinned, the heavens seemed to him as brass—no opening there, no voice or sign from God above. He himself was oppressed by a sense of sin, and dared not look up. Then it was that this dream assured him that there was no necessity for despair, that heaven and earth, the sinner's soul and God could yet be brought near together. (2) *It assured him that there was a way of reconciliation between God and man.* The gulf was bridged over. There was a way of communication between heaven and earth, in both directions, so that the love of heaven was sent down and the answer of the human heart was returned. Not only was the way to heaven opened, but it proved to be a well-trodden path. Messengers of mercy were descending from the highest heaven, and thankful prayers and praises were ascending thither. 3. *It assured him that the love of God was above all the darkness of human sin and evil.* God was at the top of this ladder (ver. 13). The Lord above, and the object of His mercy beneath, and a way of communication opened up between both. Thus God is the author of salvation, and we are accepted through a Mediator. 4. *It imparted to him the blessings of a revelation from God.* The Lord spake to Jacob, renewing the old promises made to his father Abraham, and assuring him that he would have protection to the end (vers. 13-15). It is revelation when God speaks to man. We cannot know the mind and purpose of God concerning us unless He thus declares Himself. Good things might have been prepared for us through the mercy of God, and yet we might have been unaware of them until He was pleased to make them known. There are those who say that we can have no revelation from heaven. But can we deny to God the right to speak and declare Himself—a right which we willingly concede to all His intelligent creatures? We are not left to draw rational, and too often precarious, inferences from the known dealings of God; but we have the advantage of a distinct declaration of His mind. We Christians have heard the voice of God through His word. We have heard His exceeding great and precious promises. We have a "ladder"—a way of reconciliation to God through Christ, who unites the human with the divine. Through and by Him we have access to the Father. Our prayers have free course to ascend to heaven, and the Holy Spirit descends into our hearts to inspire them. In the incarnation, God is no longer at the head of the ladder but at the foot, brought quite near to us, seeing that we have "God manifest in the flesh."

III. It revealed the awful solemnity of human life. When Jacob awaked out of his sleep, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.

And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." (Verses 16, 17.) Things that were regarded hitherto as common are now invested with an awful interest and significance, and are felt to be pervaded by a Divine presence. Such is human life when God awakens us to a sense of the reality of things. We may pass through this life quite thoughtlessly, but when we begin to think seriously, then life becomes solemn. Mystery lies on all sides of us. Whence are we? Whither do we tend? This life of ours is touched, overshadowed, and informed by a higher life. When God opens the eye of our soul, we need not travel far to some holy shrine to draw near before Him; for we are already in His house, and at the very gate of heaven. When this dream of life is over, we shall waken up to the true reality of things.

IV. It resulted in Jacob's conversion. Jacob before this time was a worldly man. He was of the earth, earthy. Now his character is changed, not only outwardly, but inwardly. He becomes a spiritual man. All things are now seen in a new light. To know the realities of God, not from tradition, or as the fruit of speculation, but from a heartfelt and true knowledge, is the conversion of our soul. Balaam felt that Israel was a righteous nation, and that Jacob was a righteous man, when he said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them." (Num. xxiii. 10–21.) This vision is Jacob's conversion, and his conduct afterwards gives evidence of that great change. 1. *He erected a memorial of the event.* He marked the spot, so that he might ever be reminded of that solemn night. Thus the impressions of the whole scene would be fixed deep in his mind for ever. The value of forms lie in the fact that they give us something material to rest upon. Where God has revealed himself to us is our holy place, our Bethel. 2. *He resolved to make God supreme in all his thoughts and actions.* "Then shall the Lord be my God." (Verse 21.) Henceforward he would not worship honour, pleasure, or the world. He would respect all the rights of God, and make a full surrender of himself and of his worldly substance. (Verse 22.) He is now altogether a devoted man; being no longer his own, but belonging to God. To have the Lord for our God is something more than an impression or a saying. It is the doing of His will. Knowledge and feeling are converted into action.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 10. Jacob's departure from his father's house formed a striking contrast with the pompous mission which had been sent to the same country when a wife was to be procured for Isaac. Without a servant to attend him, or a beast to carry him, being provided only with "a staff" to walk with (as he afterwards informs us), he pursues his solitary way. (Gen. xxxii. 10.) We here behold the heir of the promise, the chosen servant of God, in whose loins were an elect people, and many powerful kings, whose history was to occupy so large a space in the book of God; in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed; a forlorn wanderer, banished from his father's house, his whole inheritance his staff in his hand. But the sequel informs us that in the midst of this scene of outer and inner darkness God was graciously preparing a message of peace and joy for His exiled servant.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 11. He lighted upon a certain place, little thinking to have found heaven there. Let this comfort travellers and friends that part with them. Jacob never lay better than when he lay without-doors; nor yet slept sweeter than when he laid his head upon a stone." (*Trapp.*)

Jacob, in this wretched condition on his journey, is a symbol of the Messiah. Christ had not where to lay his head. (*Lange.*)

A solemn conviction is stealing over Jacob of what life is, a struggle which each man must make in self dependence. He is fairly afloat like a young swimmer, without corks, striking out for his life; dependant on self for defence, guidance, choice. Childhood is a state of dependence; but man passes from the state of dependence into that in which he must stand alone. It is a solemn crisis, because the way in which it is met often decides the character of the future life.—(*Robertson.*)

Probably Jacob found the gates of the city shut upon his arrival, and was obliged to spend the night in the open air. In the time of their darkest calamity God comes to the aid of His servants.

Perhaps the declining sun never withdrew its light from one more deep in gloom than Jacob when he paused at Luz. The canopy of heaven was his only roof—the bare earth his couch—the rugged stone his pillow. Instead of a tender mother's tender care, he had hardness in its hardest form. The Lord, whose love is wisdom, and whose wisdom is love, leads His children into depths for their good; but leaves them not in depths to their hurt. It was so with Jacob. It will be so, while saints on earth need to be brought low, that they may more securely rise. ("*Christ is All," by Archdeacon Law.*)

Verse 12. God made a direct communication to his soul. "He lay down to sleep, and he dreamed." We know what dreams are. They are strange combinations of our waking thoughts in fanciful forms, and we may trace in Jacob's previous journey the groundwork of his dream. He looked up all day to heaven as he trudged along, the glorious expanse of an Oriental sky was around him, a quivering, trembling, mass of blue; but he was alone, and, when the stars came out, melancholy sensations were his, such as youth frequently feels in the autumn time Deep questionings beset him. Time he felt was fleeting. Eternity, what was it? Life, what a mystery! And all this took form in his dream. Thus far, all was natural; the supernatural in this dream was the manner in which God impressed it upon his heart. Similar dreams we have often had; but the remembrance of them has often faded away. Conversion is the impression made by circumstances, and that impression lasting for life; it is God the Spirit's work upon the soul.—(*Robertson*).

Our Saviour applies these words to Himself, the true ladder of life, through whom alone we are able to ascend to heaven (John i. 51). He that will go up any other way must, as the emperor once said, erect a ladder and go up alone. He touched heaven, in respect to His Deity; earth in respect of His humanity; and joined earth to heaven, by reconciling man to God. Gregory speaks elegantly of Christ, that he joined heaven and earth together, as with a bridge; being the only true Pontifex, or *bridge-maker*. Heaven is now open and obvious to them that acknowledge Him their sole Mediator, and lay hold, by the hand of faith, on His merits, as the rounds of this heavenly ladder. These only ascend; that is, their consciences are drawn out of the depths of despair, and put into heaven, as it were, by pardon and peace with God, rest sweetly in His bosom, calling Him Abba, Father, and have the holy angels ascending to report their necessities, and descending, as messengers of mercies. We must also ascend, saith St. Bernard, by those two feet, as it were—meditation and prayer: yea, there must be continual ascensions in our hearts; and as Jacob saw the angels ascending and descending, and none standing still, so must we be active and abundant in God's work (1 Cor. xv. 58).—(*Trapp.*)

As connecting earth and heaven it was a striking image of mediation and reconciliation by Him who is *the Way*. This is the New Testament explanation of it (John i. 51). The idea plainly is of communication opened with heaven, which had been cut off by sin. And the immediate application of it is the providential care which is secured to him by the covenant. Angelic messengers traversing this stairway executing the gracious purposes of Redemption (Heb. i. 14), and all on the basis of the mediation of Christ, the Angel of the Covenant—this is the traveller's vision.—(*Jacobus.*)

Verse 13. God stands above the methods and means of Providence and Grace. The Divine love is the fountain of Redemption.

The heavenly ladder seen by Jacob in a dream, on which angels were ascending and descending, with the Lord himself at the summit, was itself but the weak intimation of a closer union between earth and heaven to be effected in the person of the Son of Man—an union wherein God should no longer appear far off, but near; men now at last beholding the "heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending *upon the Son of Man*."—(*Trench.*)

By this promise Jacob is secured beyond the reach of his brother's wrath.

It is remarkable that Abraham is styled his father, that is, his actual grandfather, and covenant father.—(*Murphy.*)

From Jacob's ladder we receive the first definite intimation that beyond Sheol, heaven is the home of man.—(*Lange.*)

What an honour is this to Abraham, that God was not ashamed to be called his and his son's God! "Friend to Sir Philip Sidney," is engraven upon a nobleman's tomb in this kingdom, as one of his titles. Behold the goodness of God, stooping so low as to style Himself "the God of Abraham;" and Abraham again, "the friend of God."—(*Trapp.*)

It is enough for us to be assured that God will be the same to us as He has been to our fathers, and that He will perform the same for us. By faith we become heirs of an ancient heritage, which is secure to us as an eternal possession—as long as God is our God.

Verse 14. This expression points to the world-wide universality of the kingdom of the seed of Abraham, when it shall become the fifth monarchy, that shall subdue all that went before, and endure for ever. This transcends the destiny of the natural seed of Abraham.—(*Murphy.*)

Against his four-fold cross, here is a four-fold comfort. 1. Against the loss of his friends, "I will be with thee." 2. Of his country, "I will give thee this land." 3. Against his poverty, "Thou shalt spread abroad to the east, west," etc. 4. His solitariness; angels shall attend thee, and "thy seed shall be as the dust," etc. And "who can count the dust of Jacob," saith Balaam. (Num. xxiii. 10.) Now, whatsoever God spake here with Jacob, He spake with us, as well as with him, saith Hosea. (Hosea xii. 4.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 15. He then promises to Jacob personally to be with him, protect him, and bring him back in safety. This is the third announcement of the seed that blesses to the third in the line of descent. (Gen. xii. 2, 3; xxii. 18; xxvi. 4.—(*Murphy.*)

Jacob was lonely, on an untried journey, with an uncertain fate before him. What could have been more comforting and assuring than this promise of protection in his travels, a safe return home, and success in his mission; and all because he was heir of the covenant? Thus God's promises, while they are all-embracing, are suited to our special need.

Esau's blessing was soon fulfilled; but Jacob's related to things at a great distance, and which none but

"God Almighty" could bring to pass. How seasonable then were those precious promises which furnished at his outset a ground for faith to rest upon!—(*Fuller.*)

Verse 16. He who had felt no fear in laying himself down to sleep in a lonely place, and under the cloud of night, is now filled with a holy dismay when the morning arose at the thought of being surrounded with God. But the element of joy was not extinguished by the feeling of the awful which the scene had inspired. The Lord had been specially present to him where he little thought of meeting with Him. He had laid him down to sleep, as on common ground, but he found that it was a consecrated place, hallowed by the presence of God Himself in this blessed vision of the night. It seemed a lone and uninviting spot, but it proved to him a magnificent temple.—(*Bush.*)

He knew His omnipresence. But he did not expect a special manifestation of the Lord in this place, far from the sanctuaries of his father.—(*Murphy.*)

The commonest things of life become sacred if we only think deeply about them.

We do not really discover God anywhere, not even in His Word, unless He reveals Himself inwardly to our souls. Then do we truly know that God was there, though we knew it not.

Every fresh revelation of God obliges us to confess our ignorance and inattention in the past.

Verse 17. This was the place where God manifested Himself as He was wont to do in the sanctuary.

In whatever place the soul of man feels the presence and power of God, there is the House of God.

The place of God's public worship is a place of angels and archangels, saith Chrysostom; it is the Kingdom of God; it is very heaven. What wonder, then, though Jacob be afraid, albeit, he saw nothing but visions of love and mercy. "In Thy fear will I worship toward Thy holy temple," saith David (Psa. v. 7).—(*Trapp.*)

The last impression made upon Jacob was that of the awfulness of life. Children play away life. It is a touching and softening thing to see the child, without an aim or thought, playing away his young moments; but it is sad indeed to see men and women do this, for life is a solemn mystery, full of questions that we cannot answer. Whence come we? Whither go we? How came we here? Say you that life is short, that it is a shadow, a dream, a vapour, a puff of air? Yes, it is short, but has an eternity wrapped up in it; it is a dream, but an awful, and appalling one, the most solemn dream of eternity that we shall ever have. Remember this is the gate of heaven, this is a dreadful place, the common is the Divine; God is here.—(*Robertson.*)

Earth is a court of Paradise; life, here below, is a short pilgrimage; our home is above, and the life of a blessed eternity illuminates our path.—(*Krummacher.*)

Where God's Word is found, there is a house of God. There heaven stands open.—(*Lange.*)

We must daily wait at the gate of heaven if we would enter there.

Verse 18. He was in no condition to indulge in sleep. He must be up and expressing the homage of his soul for such precious, gracious revelations.—(*Jacobus.*)

He set up a memorial of the impressions just made upon him. He erected a few stones, and called them Bethel. They were a fixed point to remind him of the past. The power of this Bethel we shall see in the 35th chap. Herein is the value of forms; impressions, feelings, will pass away unless we have some memorial. If we were merely spiritual beings then we might do without forms; but we are still mixed up with matter, and unless we have a form the spirit will die.

Resolve then, like Jacob, to keep religion in mind by the use of religious rites. Church-going, the keeping of the Sabbath, are not religion; but religion hardly lives without them. If a man will say, I can read the Bible at home, think of Christ without attending the Holy Communion, make every day a Sabbath, why his religion will die out with his omission of the form.—(*Robertson.*)

As Jacob was not induced to set up this stone and worship at it by any superstition or idolatry, so the papists gain nothing in deriving their image-worship from this act; although we read in Lev. xxvi. 1; Deut. vii. 5, xii. 3, that God has expressly prohibited these things.—(*Lange.*)

Verse 19. This place was long regarded with religious veneration, as we may infer from Jereboam's having chosen it for the seat of his idolatrous worship of the golden calves (1 Kings xii. 28, 23), for which reason the prophet Hosea, (Hosea iv. 15) alluding to the name given it by Jacob, calls it, *Beth-aven*, "the house of vanity"—*i.e.*, of idols—instead of *Beth-el*, "house of God." In like manner, (Amos v. 5): "Bethel shall *shall come to naught.*" (Heb. *shall be Aven*). A good name has no security of permanence where a change for the worse has taken place in the character. God even writes upon His own people, *Lo-Ammi*, "not my people," instead of *Ammi*, "my people," when by their transgression they forfeit His favour.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 20. It must not be understood from his conditional mode of expression that he had any doubt as to the fulfilment of the Divine promise, or that he would prescribe terms to his Maker. The language implies nothing more than his taking God at His word—a sincere avowal, that since the Lord had promised him the bestowment of inestimable blessings, he would endeavour not to be wanting in the suitable returns of duty and devotedness. God had promised to be with him, to keep him, to bring him again into the land, and not to leave him. He takes up the precious words, and virtually says, "Oh, let it be according to Thy word unto Thy servant, and Thou shalt be mine, and I will be Thine for ever." This was all right; for Jacob sought nothing which God had not promised, and he could not well err while making the Divine promises the rule and measure of his desires.—(*Bush.*)

The *order* of what he desired is deserving of notice. It corresponds with our Saviour's rule, to seek things of the greatest importance first. By how much God's favour is better than life, by so much His being with us, and keeping us is better than food and raiment.—(*Fuller.*)

The desires of Jacob were moderate. He only asks for the bare necessaries of life. He seeks not high things for himself—no wealth, or rank, or luxury. We know from the case of Solomon that such modest desires are approved by God, who is wont to fulfil them even beyond what we have asked. (1 Kings iii. 5–12.)

Nature is content with little; grace with less. "Food and drink are the riches of Christians," saith Jerome. Bread and water, with the Gospel, are good cheer. One told a philosopher, "If you will be content to please Dionysius, you need not feed upon green herbs. He replied, "And if you be content to feed upon green herbs, you need not please Dionysius."—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 21. This is not the condition in which Jacob will accept God in a mercenary spirit. It is the response of the son to the assurance of the father. "Wilt Thou indeed be with me? Thou shalt be my God."—(*Murphy.*)

There is clear evidence that Jacob was now a child of God. He takes God to be his God in covenant, with whom he will live. But what progress there is between Bethel and Peniel. Grace reigns within him, but not without a conflict. The powers and tendencies of evil are still at work. He yields too readily to their urgent solicitations. Still, grace and the principles of the renewed man gain a stronger hold, and become more and more controlling. Under the loving but faithful discipline of God, he is gaining in his faith, until, in the great crisis of his life, Mahanaim and Peniel, and the new revelations then given to him, it receives a large and sudden increase. He is thenceforward trusting, serene, and established, strengthened and settled, and passes into the quiet life of the triumphant believer.—(*Lange.*)

CHAPTER XXIX.

Critical Notes.—1. Went on his journey.] Heb. *Lifted up his feet.* (See Ps. lxxiv. 3.) The idea is that he journeyed with alacrity. *Rashi*, the Jewish commentator, says, "his heart was elated, and his feet felt light." *Came into the land of the people of the East.* Mesopotamia, east of Palestine.—**2. A well in the field.]** "This well is apparently not the same as that in Chron. xxiv. 11, etc. It seems to be further from the city, and different in its management. This well is closed by a large stone, which is only removed at the assemblage of the flocks and shepherds in the evening." *Alford.*—**5. Laban, the son of Nahor.]** He was the son of Bethuel, but, according to the usage of the Heb., he is called the son of Nahor, though only his grandson.—**6. Is he well?]** Heb. "(is there) peace to him?" Not only health, but also general welfare and prosperity.—**7. High day.]** Heb. "Yet the day is great." *i.e.*, a great part of the day yet remains. "As it was yet too early to gather the flocks into their stalls for the night, Jacob, who was well versed in pastoral life, was at a loss to account for the fact that they were not watered and turned again to pasture instead of wasting a good part of the day idly about the well. After being watered and allowed to rest themselves awhile in the shade, in the middle of the day (Cant. i. 7), the flocks were usually turned out again to feed till sunset." (*Bush*).—**8. We cannot.]** A moral inability is intended. The idea conveyed is that it was not permitted—it was contrary to usage. This commonly understood rule may have been agreed upon in order to secure a fair distribution of the water.—**14. And he abode with him the space of a month.** "He remained this length of time before any fixed arrangement was made for wages." (*Jacobus.*)—**15. Because thou art my brother.]** That is, my kinsman. This word, like "sister," "son," etc., is used with great latitude in the sacred writings. **17. Leah was tender-eyed—weak-eyed.]** "Leah's eyes were feeble, *i.e.*, *dull*, without brilliancy and freshness. In the East the clear expressive lustrous eye is accounted the chief feature in female beauty. It was compared to the eyes of a gazelle (1 Sam, xvi. 12). (*Alford*)—**Beautiful and well-favoured.]** Having a fine shape and fine features—beautiful both in form and in appearance. **18. I will serve thee seven years for Rachel.]** It is still the custom in the East to serve for a wife. "Jacob could only pay by service. The daughter was not necessarily sold as a slave; but the parent received a price as a compensation for her rearing and training." (*Jacobus.*)—**23. He took Leah, his daughter, and brought her to him.]** "The fraud was rendered possible by the Eastern custom of the bride being veiled, aided by the darkness of the night." (*Alford.*)—**27. Fulfil her week.]** "Attach thyself to her during the accustomed days of the wedding-feast" (Judges xiv. 12; Tobit xi. 19.) *Alford.*—**31. Leah was hated.]** The word is to be understood relatively, not absolutely. By the usage of the Heb. to be hated, signifies only to be loved less. **32. Reuben.]** The name means, "see ye a son." **33. Simeon.]** Heb. *hearing.* **34. Levi.]** Heb. *joined.* Implies that the husband and wife would be bound together by this *threefold cord* of attachment. **35. Judah.]** Heb. *praise.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–14.

Jacob's Experience on his Journey.

I. That God's presence with him made his duties and his troubles light. Jacob had just left Bethel, where the Almighty had granted him so encouraging a vision, and where he devoted himself to God by so remarkable a vow. Many a weary journey still lay between him and the place of his destination. He would have to encounter danger, uncertainty, and fatigue. But now since he has been at Bethel he walks with life and strength renewed. "*He lifted up* *his feet*"—proceeded on his journey with feelings of alacity and joy to which he had long been a stranger. The sorrows of the first day's march are described at length, but the experience of the remainder of this long and wearisome journey is briefly and simply told. The inspired historian dispatches the four hundred miles in a single verse. "Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the East." He who casts his burden upon the Lord ceases to weary himself, and finds that even labour is rest and pain is sweet.

II. That Providence was still his guide. All his life through Providence had guided him, but he knew it not as he ought to know. Now, even in the most ordinary and likely events of life he learns to trace the hand of Providence. The incidents of this history are simple, and, for the most part, they are such as would have happened to any ordinary traveller. Jacob arrives at a well, a company of shepherds assemble for the purpose of watering their flocks. Jacob enters into conversation with them in the free and unrestrained manner of those early times. He asks them whence they are, and finds that they happen to know Laban, his uncle. They tell him that Rachel, Laban's daughter, is coming with the sheep. Jacob suggests to the shepherds that it is too early to gather their flocks, probably using this as an excuse that he might meet Rachel alone. Rachel comes up in the meantime, Jacob is struck with her appearance, for she "was beautiful and well favoured." The purpose of his journey and of all his strange experience is now revealed. Providence brings to this spot the very woman who is designed to be the wife of Jacob. Surely he could not fail to see that even through all the strange trials of his journey, and through the most untoward events, the will of God was being accomplished.

III. That God's gracious dealings with him called for gratitude. Jacob was deeply touched by the kindness of God; and while he embraced Rachel, he "lifted up his voice and wept." They were tears started by the remembrance of his faithless misgivings, but they were also tears of joy at the thought that his difficulties were at an end, and that the great object of his mission had been gained. Jacob makes bold to announce himself and his message, for he was confident of the mercy of God and of the strength of His Holy Covenant. (Verses 12, 13.) He is altogether a changed man now, and gives proof that he had passed through a great spiritual crisis by acknowledging God in all His ways.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. He went lightly on his long journey. "The joy of the Lord" was Jacob's "strength." It became as oil; wherewith his soul being supplied he was made more lithe, nimble, and fit for action. Let us pluck up our feet, pass from strength to strength, and take long and lusty strides towards heaven. It is but a little afore us; and a ready heart rids the way apace. —*(Trapp.)*

The way before us may be long and wearisome. There may be much to vex and distress us, but if we serve Jacob's God the consolation of Jacob will be ours. The rest of our journey will be passed over easily, and the history of it may be told in few words—"They went on their journey, and they have entered into the land."

Verses 2, 3. This is but a slight indication of all that these early shepherds were to their flocks, for in truth they were very different from what they are among us. The shepherds of that time looked upon their sheep as friends; they shared the same dangers as their sheep, and often risked their lives to procure sustenance for the sheep, and, as ever, danger intensified their mutual affection.—(*Robertson.*)

Verses 4–6. Jacob, on making inquiry, learns that Haran is at hand, that Laban is well, and that Rachel is drawing nigh with her father's flocks. —(*Murphy.*)

Verses 7, 8. We have here a conception given us of the church as a family. All had a right to move the stone from the well, and take water therefrom, at any hour of the day; but they agreed only to open it once a day, and then take sufficient for the wants of the day, otherwise the well would have been left uncovered, for the stone was too heavy to be so frequently moved on and off for everyone separately, and the consequence would have been that the well would have become impure and the water dried up. The family is the type both of the church and nation; and without the concessions, love, and consideration of a family, both church and nation lose their characteristic principles.—(*Robertson.*)

Verses 9–11. Again, it is a unity of variety required to form a church, for so it is in the family; it is not composed of all brothers or all sisters, all parents or all children, but of all four united in their variety. "Surely thou art my bone and my flesh." (Verse 14.) Manifestly here is the sacredness of family ties; Jacob had never seen Rachael before, but when he heard she was the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, he felt drawn to her by a mysterious power, "and Jacob," we read, "kissed Rachel and lifted up his voice and wept." (Verse 11.) Even so are Christians united to Christ and to one another in a spiritual manner.—(*Robertson.*)

The sight of the daughter of his mother's brother affected him. The tears shed on this occasion must have arisen from a full heart. We cannot say that the love which he afterwards bore to Rachel did not commence from his first seeing her. But, however that might be, the cause of his weeping was of another kind: it was her being "the daughter of his *mother's* brother," that now affected him. Everything that revived *her* memory, even the very flocks of sheep that belonged to *her* brother, went to his heart. Nor did he wish to be alone with Rachel, but that he might give vent without reserve to these sensations.—(*Fuller.*)

Verses 12–14. Rachel's eager, cordial reception of him, and the simplicity of her joy in carrying home the news, all remind us of Rebekah in the previous history.—(*Jacobus.*)

Sudden tidings of good excite the feelings. Such is the joy of salvation when the soul recognises her true relationship to God the Redeemer.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 15-30

JACOB'S LOWLY ESTATE.

I. Its evidence. Jacob is now found in a mean condition, as is evident from these circumstances:—1. *That he is obliged to accept a position of servitude.* For the space of one month Jacob served his uncle, but nothing was said with respect to terms. It was not for Jacob to speak on such a subject, for he had nothing to offer except his labour, he was poor and dependent. Jacob could not assume the proud and advantageous position of one who came with pomp, retinue, and riches. It was, therefore, Laban's part to propose the terms, and Jacob was forced by circumstances to accept the humiliating conditions. 2. *He is obliged to prostitute the most sacred affections by consenting to a mercenary bargain.* Laban demands of Jacob what his wages should be, which gives Jacob an opportunity of declaring his love for Rachel. He had no dowry to offer her, like his father Isaac. He could only purchase her by his labours, a bargain which was rendered possible by primitive custom. It was humiliating to be obliged thus to earn his wife before he could have her. It was degrading the most tender feelings of the heart thus to make them a subject of commercial treaty. In the days of Hosea, when the children of Israel had grown haughty, the prophet reminds them of these degrading circumstances concerning their ancestor, "Jacob *fled* into the country of Syria, and Israel *served* for a wife, and for a wife he *kept sheep*." (Hosea xii. 12.)

II. Its consolation. The seven years that Jacob had to serve for Rachel passed away so pleasantly, that they seemed to him but a few days. (Verse 20.) Love lightens and cheers every task of labour and endurance. A week of years was like a week of days to him. *Coleridge* says, "No man could be a bad man who loved as Jacob loved Rachel."

III. Its lessons for his posterity. Israel was destined to rise to eminence and power amongst the family of nations. But it was necessary for that people to be reminded of the lowly estate of their forefather. When the Israelite presented his basket of first fruits before the Lord, he was instructed to confess, "A Syrian *ready to perish* was my father" (Deut. xxvi. 5). The nation was thus taught that all its greatness and prosperity were not due to natural endowments and industry, but to the electing love of God. The strength of His grace was made perfect in weakness.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 15. Laban proposes a fixed contract. This may have been only to protect himself against any undue expectations of Jacob. He will pay him like an ordinary servant. Or it may have been in a fair and manly generosity.—(*Jacobus*).

Jacob was the type of the active, industrious man. He was not an idle guest, but employed himself about his uncle's business, thus making such return as was in his power for the kindness he received.

Laban pretends love and equity to his covetous aims and reaches. Hypocrites, whatever they pretend, have a hawk's eye to praise or profit. They must be gainers by their piety or humanity, which must be another Diana to bring gain to the craftsmaster. The eagle, when she soareth highest, hath an eye ever to the prey. —(*Trapp.*)

Verses 16, 17. Daughters in those countries and times were also objects of value, for which their parents were wont to receive considerable presents (Gen. xxiv. 53).—(*Murphy*).

Verse 18. He had nothing to endow her with; he would therefore earn her with his hard labour, which, as it shows Laban's churlishness to suffer it, and his baseness to make a prize and a prey of his two daughters, so it sets forth Jacob's meekness, poverty, patience, and hard condition here. He was a man of many sorrows, and from him, therefore, the Church hath her denomination; neither were the faithful ever since called Abrahamites but Israelites.—(*Trapp*).

We see here the degraded position in which women were regarded among the ancients. They were looked upon merely as slaves or servants; and therefore, as by marriage the father was deprived of his daughter's services, he always demanded some dowry or compensation; thus, Jacob served seven years to recompense Laban for the loss of his daughter's services.—(*Robertson.*)

Verse 19. Jacob, as a younger brother, had an unquestionable claim to Rachel, the youngest daughter of Laban. Among all the Bedouin Arabs living in that day a man has the exclusive right to the hand of his first cousin; he is not obliged to marry her, but she cannot be married to another without his consent.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 20. This verse beautifully represents Jacob's lightheartedness in the presence of his beloved. It is wonderful to our minds to remember that these seven years were from the 78th to the 85th year of Jacob's age.—(*Alford.*)

No other feeling of the human mind could have shortened and sweetened the term of that lengthened bondage. Ambition, avarice, fear, and a host of similar passions, will all make the bond-slave obedient to the beck of the hardest taskmaster; but there is none, save love, the master passion of the human heart, which can enable its possessor to render not only a willing, but a happy and joyful obedience.—(*Blunt.*)

And yet lovers' hours are full of eternity. But love facilitated the service, and made the time seem short. Should anything seem hard or heavy to us, so we may have heaven at length. The affliction is but light and momentary; the glory massy, and for all eternity. Hold out, Faith and Patience. Love is a passion, and seen most in suffering; "much water cannot quench it" (Cant. viii. 7.) Nay, like fire, it devours all delays and difficulties, spending and exhaling itself, as it were, in continual wishes to be at home, "to be with Christ; is far better." (Phil. i. 23.) Oh, let the eternal weight of the crown weigh down with us the light and momentary weight of the cross.—(*Trapp.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 21-28.

LABAN'S FRAUD ON JACOB.

I. The character of the fraud. Jacob had served for his wife, and now demands her as his just right. When the time came for the bride to be conducted to the marriage chamber, Laban substitutes Leah for Rachel. It was not difficult to carry out this deception, as it was evening and the bride was conducted to the chamber of the husband closely veiled. In the morning Jacob discovered the fraud, and complained, "Did not I serve with thee for Rachel? Wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?" (Verse 25.) This fraud was, 1. *Deliberate.* It was not the result of sudden temptation by which a man is overtaken in a fault, but was quite in accordance with the settled habits and principles of Laban's character. He was a covetous and scheming man, and had little scruple in demanding the services of a helpless relative under plausible professions of disinterestedness. 2. *Bold.* Laban attempts to justify his conduct by a reference to the custom of the country. (Verse 26.) But, why did he not mention this objection before, and why did he promise that which he considered he ought not to perform? He is bold and daring in the defence of his conduct as he was crafty in designing it. 3. *Selfish.* He proposes to give him Rachel when another week is fulfilled. (Verse 27.) Jacob's labours were very valuable to him, and this was a shrewd device to bind Jacob for a longer term of service.

II. The fraud considered as a retribution. Jacob had deceived his own father, and now he is himself deceived. The measure which he meted is measured to him again. The sheep of God's pasture may be found and restored, but they are often brought back wounded and lacerated, and smarting from the effects of their own folly and sin. Jacob who had deceived is now, in turn, overreached. Leah also deceived her husband, and as a natural consequence lost his affections. There are sins which in this world are often punished in *kind.* "Be sure your sin will find you out." (Num. xxxii. 23).

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 21, 22. Laban, like some in their gifts to God, is not wanting in ceremony. He "made a feast," gave his daughter a hand-maid, and went through all the forms; but the gift was a deception.—(*Fuller*).

Verse 23. According to the custom of those eastern nations, the bride was conducted to the bed of her husband, with silence, in darkness, and covered from head to foot with a veil; circumstances all of them favourable to the wicked, selfish plan which Laban had formed to detain his son-in-law longer in his service. He who employed undue advantage to arrive at the right of the first-born has undue advantage taken of him in having the first-born put in place of the younger. He who could practise on a father's blindness, though to obtain a laudable end, is, in his turn, practised upon by a father, employing the cover of the night to accomplish a very unwarrantable purpose.—(*Hunter.*)

God pays us often in our own coin, Herod mocked the wise men, and is mocked of them. (Matt. ii. 16.) And how oft do we see those that would beguile others, punished with illusion? God usually retaliates, and proportions jealousy to jealousy, provocation to provocation (Deut. xxxii. 21,) number to number (Isa. lxv. 11, 12,) choice to choice (Isa. lxvi. 3, 4,) device to device (Micah ii. 1, 3,) frowardness to frowardness (Ps. xviii. 26,) contrariety to contrariety (Lev. xxvi. 21.) Even the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth (Prov. xi. 31,) as was Jacob. —(*Trapp.*)

Verse 24. It is still customary in the East for a father, who can afford it, to transfer to his daughter, on her marriage, some female slave of the household, who becomes her confidential domestic and humble friend. This slave forms a link between the old and new households, which often proves irksome, but he has little, if any, control over the female slaves in his establishment.—(*Bush.*)

Verses 25, 26. A foul disappointment, but so the world ever serves us. The Hebrews have taken up this passage for a proverb, when a man's hopes are deceived in a wife, or anything else, wherein he looked for content or comfort.—(*Trapp.*)

But he received, notwithstanding his ignorance as to Leah, the wife designed for him by God, who was to become the mother of the Messiah, just as Isaac blessed him unwittingly as the rightful heir of the promise. Ah, in how many errors and follies of man, here and everywhere, do we find God's inevitable grace and faithfulness intertwined.—(*Ross.*)

Verses 27, 28. And now he must begin a new hope, where he made account of fruition. To raise up an expectation, once frustrate, is more difficult than to continue a long hope drawn on with likelihoods of performance; yet thus dear is Jacob content to pay for Rachel fourteen year's servitude. Commonly, God's children come not easily by their pleasures. What miseries will not love digest and overcome? And if Jacob were willingly consumed with heat in the day, and frost in the night, to become the son-in-law to Laban, what should we refuse to be the sons of God?—(*Bishop Hall*).

Jacob's service for Rachel presents us a picture of bridal love equalled only in the same development and its poetic beauty in the Song of Solomon. It is particularly to be noticed that Jacob, however, was not indifferent to Rachel's infirmities (chap. xxx. 2), and even treated Leah with patience and indulgence, through having suffered from her the most mortifying deception.—(*Lange*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 29–35.

LEAH AND RACHEL: THEIR TRIALS AND COMPENSATIONS.

I. Their trials. Leah was "hated" (verse 31), *i.e.*, she was loved less than Rachel. By becoming a party to a heartless fraud she lost her husband's affections. And Rachel, the beloved wife was denied the blessing of children, so coveted by the ancient Hebrew mothers (verse 31). Both had trials, though of a different kind.

II. Their compensations. Leah was blessed with children, which compensated her for the loss of her husband's love. The names of the four sons successively born to her were all significant, and betoken that pious habit of mind which recognised the hand of God in all that befel her. She called the first-born, Reuben, Heb. "see ye a son." The second, Simeon, Heb. "hearing," for God had heard her prayer and seen her affliction. The third was named Levi, Heb. "joined." Now, surely, would the breach be healed and the husband and wife joined together by this threefold cord. The fourth she called Judah, Heb. "praise," as if recording her thankfulness that she had won the affections of her husband by bearing to him so many sons. Rachel, on the other hand, continued barren. But she was compensated by her beauty, and by the thought that she was first in her husband's affections. Thus with the evils which fall to the lot of individuals, there are compensations.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 29–31. Here we have punishment tempered with mercy. This is what the cross has done for us; it prevents penalty from being simply penalty; it leaves us not alone to punishment, but mingles all with blessing and forgiveness. Through it life has its bright as well as its dark side. (*Robertson.*)

Rachel whom he loved is barren; Leah, which was despised, is fruitful. How wisely God weighs out to us our favours and crosses in an equal balance; so tempering our sorrows that we may not oppress, and our joys that they may not transport us; each one hath some matter of envy to others, and of grief to himself.—(*Bishop Hall*).

Verses 32–35. Children are *joining* mercies between husband and wife. As many children as parents have, so many bonds of love exist between them.—(*Bush*).

Signification of the word from which "Judah" is derived: 1 to thank; 2 to commend; 3 to praise; 4 to confess. From this Judah all Jews received their beautiful name.—(*Lange*).

CHAPTER XXX.

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. **Give me children, or else I die.]** Heb. "If none, I am a dead woman." As to the raising up of seed, I shall be as good as dead. An old Jewish proverb says, "The childless are but as the lifeless. 6. **Dan.]** Judging. The word is to be understood in a good sense as implying the vindication or deliverance of those who are unrighteously condemned or afflicted. (1 Sam. xxiv. 15). 8. **Naphtali.]** Heb. "Wrestlings of God," i.e., great, urgent vehement. 11. **Gad.]** Heb. "A troop cometh." It is doubtful, however, whether the word really means troop. Most of the earlier versions give the sense of "luck, fortune, or prosperity."

The Chal. has "fortune cometh." Alford remarks: "The A.V. has followed the Samaritan Pentateuch, which here reads a different word from the Hebrew. The familiar rendering of the latter seems the only expressive way of giving the sense. Where this is the case I have not shrank from using the words. We need not dilute the meaning of the text because the words happen to be in trivial use among us. **13. Asher.]** Heb. "Happy or blessed." All would call her blessed, seeing she was so rich in sons. There are marked allusions to this. (Prov. xxxi. 28; Cant. vi. 9; Luke i. 48). **14. Mandrakes.]** "The mandrake is universally distributed in all parts of Palestine, and its fruit is much valued by the natives, who still hold to the belief, as old as the time of Rachel, that when eaten it ensures conception. Wheat harvest is the period of its ripening." [*Tristram's Natural History of the Bible*]. The words occur only here and in Cant, vii. 13. **17. God hearkened unto Leah.]** These words presuppose a prayer on her part, or perhaps they are used merely in the more general sense of ch. xvi. 11, "The Lord hath heard thy affliction." (*Alford.*)—**18. Issachar.]** Heb. "It is a reward."—**20. Zebulon.]** Heb. "Dwelling." This vow should be the cause or occasion of the dwelling together of his parents.—**21. Dinah.]** "*Dinah*, meaning *judgment*, from the same root as *Dan*." This is the only daughter of Jacob mentioned, and *that* on account of her connection with the history of Jacob. (Ch. xxxiv.) (*Jacobus.*) Jacob had more daughters: compare ch. xxxvii. 35, with xlvi. 7.—**23. My reproach.]** That is, the reproach of my barrenness. (See Luke i. 25; 1 Sam. 1. 6; Is. iv. 1.)—**24. Joseph.]** "Adding," or, "he will add." It may also be rendered in the form of a prayer, "May the Lord add another." Thus it would be a prophetic declaration of the event which was accomplished in the birth of Benjamin.—**27. I have learned by experience.]** This verb is taken from a noun, which means a serpent. It seems to have such a meaning as, "to ascertain by means of a close, subtle, and insidious inspection." Alford says that the word literally means, "I have used divination, I have learned by consulting omens."—**33. So shall my righteousness answer for me.]** That is, my honesty shall be vindicated.—**37. Pilled white streaks in them.]** "He pealed off the bark of different trees which were very white under the bark, so that they would be speckled and ring-streaked." (*Jacobus.*)—**40. And Jacob did separate the lambs, etc.]** *Kalisch* translates thus, "And he set the faces of (Laban's) flocks towards (his own) ring-streaked, and all (his) dark (he set) to the flocks of Laban; and he put his own flocks by themselves, and did not put them to Laban's cattle."—**44. And the man increased exceedingly.]** Heb. "The man broke forth largely, largely." On every side he expanded—his prosperity was enlarged.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–13.

RACHEL'S IMPATIENCE.

Rachel found that, with all her beauty, she was childless. In Oriental countries, where the maternal relation is counted a great glory, a childless marriage is regarded as a shame and calamity. Here we see the character and effects of Rachel's impatience of her barrenness.

I. It was ungodly. 1. *She was the victim of unholy passions.* She was full of envy and jealousy of her sister. Not content to enjoy the many blessings still remaining, she increases her trouble by inordinate desire of that which Providence had denied. 2. *She took a despairing view of life.* Rachel reproaches her husband and says to him, "Give me children, or else I die." As if everything was gone from life when she was denied this one blessing. This was to take a despairing view of things, to allow one privation or calamity to swallow up all her joy. Such conduct is ungodly, for it is not the habit of the truly religious mind to dwell upon a few evils until they darken the whole of life. True faith in God would produce resignation. 3. *She failed rightly to recognise the true Author of all good things.* Her husband rightly replied, "Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?" How could he give that which God had been pleased to withhold? Rachel did not consider the will of God in this matter, and her husband was filled with righteous indignation at her impiety.

II. It led to the adoption of wrong expedients. She gave her maid to her husband, after the example of Sarah (Ch. xvi. 2). In this way she hoped to have children, which she could call her own, in some sense—to become a mother by proxy. This was a blamable expediency, for it showed the impatient haste of unbelief and a want of confidence in Providence.

III. It had an influence for evil. 1. *Upon her own character.* When her maid had born children, she begins to boast over her sister. (Verses 6, 8.) This was but a delusion, for there was no real ground for such vain glory. It was but a fancied happiness that she enjoyed. She was the victim of unrealities. 2. *Upon her sister.* Leah ceases to bear children, and therefore adopts the same expedient as Rachel (Verse 9). The proud and challenging assertions of Rachel roused her to emulation. Leah, who had been pious and humble before, now becomes proud and vindictive. Thus radical defects of character tend to propagate their own likeness in others.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Her envy was, no doubt, sharpened in this case by the fact that Leah was her sister, and by the knowledge that she was herself the favourite and elected wife. She must have feared that she should lose her ascendancy over Jacob by the want of children,—(*Bush.*)

Beauty and barrenness, deformity and fruitfulness: such are the compensations of Providence.

Discontent takes away the glory of life, and prevents us from enjoying the blessings we have.

How different is Rachel's conduct from Rebekah's in like circumstances (Ch. xxv. 22), and from Hannah's (1 Sam. i. 11).

Verse 2. Jacob was concerned for the honour of God, and not for any injury or injustice done to himself.

To murmur at the power and providence of the Most High shows a rebellious will.

He that will be angry, and not sin, must not be angry but for sin. Reprove thy wife thou mayest; chide her thou mayest not, unless the offence be against God, as here, and Job ii. 10. —(*Trapp.*)

Verses 3–5. It is a weak greediness in us to bring about God's blessings by unlawful means. What a proof and a praise had it been of her faith, if she had staid God's leisure, and would rather have endured her barrenness, than her husband's polygamy.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

Verses 6–8. *God hath judged me.* In this passage Jacob and Rachel use the common noun, God, the Everlasting, and therefore Almighty, who rules in the physical relations of things, a name suitable to the occasion. He had judged her, dealt with her according to His sovereign justice in withholding the fruit of the womb, when she was self-complacent and forgetful of her dependence on a higher power; and also of hearing her voice when she approached him in humble supplication.—(*Murphy.*)

She regarded the withholding of children as evidence of her lacking God's favour; and she had been led to wrestlings of prayer to God for the blessing, as between herself and her sister, and she had *prevailed.* She now regarded the conflict as decided to her advantage.—(*Jacobus.*)

Verses 9–13. Leah is seemingly conscious that she is here pursuing a device of her own heart; and hence there is no explicit reference to the Divine name or influence in the naming of the two sons of her maid.—(*Murphy.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 14–21.

TWO TYPES OF RELIGIOUS CHARACTER.

I. The type represented by Rachel. This character consists mainly of two elements. 1. *Distrust.* Rachel had no strong faith in God. There was no disposition to abide by His will, or to wait patiently for its unfolding. 2. *The tendency to rely upon carnal devices.* Rachel was fruitful in expedients instead of depending upon the favours of Providence. This character is the opposite of that which belongs to the meek. It is the character of the wilful who strive to accomplish their own ends by any means, regardless of what God's will may decide. The meek humbly submit themselves under the Lord's hand.

II. The type represented by Leah. This also consists mainly of two elements. 1. *Prayerful trust in God.* Leah is content to forego the carnal means which would take the matter out of God's hand. She will pray and trust in Him. "God hearkened unto Leah" (Verse 17), for she prayed, and has again the advantage over Rachel with all her expedients. 2. *The spirit of gratitude.* Leah ascribes her blessings to God. "God hath given me my hire." Verse 18.) "God hath endued me with a good dowry. (Verse 20).

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 14–17. *Mandrakes*, the fruit of the *mandragora vernalis*, which is to this day supposed to promote fruitfulness of the womb. Rachel therefore desires to partake of them, and obtains them by a compact with Leah.—(*Murphy.*)

Verse 18. *God hath given me my hire.* Wherein she was much mistaken, as having not her "senses exercised to discern good and evil." Here she rejoiceth in that for which she should have repented; and was in the common error of measuring things by the success, as if God were not many times angry with men, though they outwardly prosper. Thus Dionysius, after the spoils of an idol-temple, finding the winds favourable—"Lo," said he, "how the gods approve of sacrilege!" —(*Trapp.*)

Verses 19–21. Leah's election is founded upon Jehovah's grace. Without any doubt, however, she was fitted to become the ancestress of the Messianic line, not only by her apparent humility, but also by her innate powers of blessing, as well as by her quiet and true love for Jacob. The fulness of her life becomes apparent in the number and the power of her children; and with these, therefore, a greater strength of the mere natural life predominates. Joseph, on the contrary, the favourite son of the wife loved with a bridal love, is distinguished from his brethren as the separated (Ch. xlix,) among them, as a child of a nobler spirit, whilst the import of his life is not as rich for the future as that of Judah.—(*Lange.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 22–24.

GOD'S FAVOUR TOWARDS RACHEL.

1. It was long delayed. The blessing which Rachel had long desired was, at length, granted. She had not lost the love of God—for *that* lives on—she had only been denied His *favour* for a time. God grants His favours as it

pleases Him, and yet always with a view to the blessed designs of our discipline. They are bestowed at the best time for us. So it was with Rachel. For upwards of fourteen years of her married life she had been barren. God, at length, "*remembered* Rachel," as if she had been forgotten before; for so we may speak of God's delayed blessings from our human point of view. When the good we seek comes not, we begin to think that we are forgotten; that prayers are of no use when they are not immediately answered. But if we are faithful we shall be blessed according to the time wherein we have been afflicted.

II **It was granted to her after some solemn lessons had been learned.** During the long delay Rachel had time to learn some solemn lessons, and which often have to be learned only through painful discipline. 1. *The lesson of dependence.* She had to be taught that whatever human means are used to gain our ends, all ultimate success depends upon the will of God. All gifts come from His hand. 2 *The lesson of patience.* She had to wait long for this blessing; and when it was granted, she would see how good it is to be patient. 3 *The lesson of faith and hope.* She had now learned not to despair because God did not at once grant her desires. It was good to believe and hope. If we abide faithful our confident trust in God will be justified in the end.

III. **It awakened gratitude.** This spirit showed itself. 1 *In a grateful recognition of God's dealings.* She said, "God hath taken away my reproach" (verse 23). The blessing itself was evident; but she recognised the divine source from whence it came. She did not trace the gift to some irresponsible powers of nature, but to the distinct favour of a personal God. 2 *In the heartfelt acknowledgment of God.* She called the name of her son, Joseph, saying "The Lord shall add to me another son." She had previously used the name Elohim, which means the invisible Eternal (verse 6); now she uses the name Jehovah, signifying the manifest self-existant-God as known in His covenant relation. This was an important advance in spiritual knowledge and feeling. The distant God becomes near. The God of nature becomes the God of providence and grace. This is similar to the experience of Job, (Job xlii. 5, 6). Rachel has now hope for the future, for she feels that she has an interest in the covenant of promise. What a blessed contrast to her former state of despair! (verse 1).

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 22. She began to think that God had forgotten her, because her prayer was not answered. This is a common fault. David bewails it himself. (Ps. lxxvii.) So the church of old. (Ps. lxiii. 15.)—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 23, 24. A sweet and sure way of argumentation. God, that hath thus and thus done me good, will not be wanting to me in anything that may conduce to mine eternal comfort; but "will perfect that which concerneth me." (Ps. cxxxviii. 8.)—(*Trapp.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 25–43.

Jacob's New Contract of Service.

I. **It was entered upon in opposition to his better feelings and convictions.** There were ordinary considerations of self interest which would urge Jacob to leave the service of Laban. He felt now that the time had come when he must make an adequate provision for his own house. (Verse 30.). And with Laban's selfishness there was very little chance of accomplishing this. But in consenting to stay, he had to do violence to better feelings than this of self interest. 1. *Natural affection.* He longs to see his parents again and to visit the land of his nativity. He had been detained in a strange country for a much longer time than he had expected. The old feelings for home and kindred now grow strong within him. He had to overcome them in consenting—for the present—to stay. 2. *Religious faith.* Jacob has now reached the age of fourscore years and ten, and as the birthright son he longed to visit the land which God had promised to him and to his seed. He remembered that the land of his sojourning was not the land of his inheritance. He now calls to mind the hereditary hope of his family, the parting benediction of Isaac, the vision at Bethel. He is also full of joy at the birth of Joseph, whom he considered as the Messianic son, and he naturally desires to bring him into the promised land. And if he overcomes these feelings for a time, it was only at the urgent solicitations of Laban, whom he did not like to make his enemy by refusing him. He also wanted to gain some wealth, so that he might not return to his friends in Canaan empty-handed. But his faith grasped the old promise. (Heb. xi. 9; xiii. 14.)

II. It was marked by worldly prudence. 1. *That prudence which calculates.* Jacob hints at the value of his long services, and Laban is ready to acknowledge how much they had contributed to his own prosperity. (Verses 26, 27.) Jacob agrees to remain for a sufficient consideration. (Verses 28–33.) Here was the calculating prudence of a man who was able to survey the whole situation at a glance 2. *The prudence which takes advantage of superior knowledge.* Throughout the whole of these long years of Jacob's service, Laban had been working entirely for his own advantage. He now flatters Jacob, while he is trying all the time to overreach him. When he asks what wages Jacob would require, he makes sure to himself all the time that Jacob's modesty would dispose him to name a small sum. Laban now thought that he had caught him, but he had to deal with a man of cunning and of deep resources. Jacob took advantage of the superior knowledge, which he had gained from the study and observation of nature, in order to outdo his uncle. (Verses 37–43). Here were cunning and sagacity matched against avarice. This kind of cunning, which makes use of superior knowledge, is often the resource of the weak against the strong. Men who are grasping and treacherous without art are often overmatched by men of unsuspected device and skill. There is much both to praise and to blame in Jacob's conduct. (1.) *He had justice on his side.* His claims were righteous. (Verses 29, 30.) He was now only taking advantage of his superior knowledge of nature as an offset to the disadvantage under which he started. But (2) *he is to be blamed for his want of candour.* He lacked that openness and simplicity of character which we expect to see in the righteous man. His plan was successful, but the craft of it is not to be wholly commended. However, if we regard the historical order of development in Revelation, we must not severely consider the conduct of Jacob by the Christian standard.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 25. In this declaration there was something more than the mere longing of the natural man for the land of his nativity; we behold in it the strong and influential faith of these ancient patriarchs, believing implicitly the promises of their God, that the land, of which not an acre belonged to them, should, in due time, be wholly theirs; that their seed should be as the stars of heaven, and that from their loins should spring the Saviour of the world. In looking to Canaan, they looked to the heaven which it typified. They saw the promises afar off. (Heb. xi. 13. 16.)

When the close of our services on earth has arrived, and we have done the work which God has given us to do, then we may look for our pure and permanent home in heaven. We may pray, in all meekness and humility, "Lord, send me away, that I may go to the place and to the country" which Thou has prepared for me through Thy Son.

Verses 26, 27. His greedy kinsman expresses his regret at hearing his departure spoken of. But it is not regret at the thought of parting with his daughters and his grand-children; it is not the tender concern of bidding a long farewell to a near relation and a devoted servant; no, it is regret at losing an instrument of gain. It is the sorrow of a man who loves only himself.—(*Bush.*)

Men of the world often see that the good and pious are a benefit to them, and they prefer such for servants. They often receive temporal benefits of such pious associations and relationships in life.—(*Jacobus.*)

Verses 28–30. Jacob touches upon the value of his services, perhaps with the tacit feeling that Laban in equity owed him at least the means of returning to his home.—(*Murphy.*)

Verses 31–33. *Thou shalt not give me anything.* This shows that Jacob had no stock from Laban to begin with. *Remove from thence every speckled and spotted sheep,* etc. These were rare colours, as in the East the sheep are usually white, and the goats black or dark brown. *And such shall be my hire.* Such as these uncommon particoloured cattle, when they shall appear among the flock already cleared of them; and not those of this description that are now removed. For in this case Laban would have given Jacob something; whereas Jacob was resolved to be entirely dependent on Divine providence for his hire. *And my righteousness will answer for me.* The colour will determine at once whose the animal is.—(*Murphy.*)

Jacob was willing to trust to Providence with an artful use of the means which his experience furnished him.—(*Jacobus.*)

Verses 34–36. If Laban had been honest, he would have represented to Jacob, that he would be a great loser by this bargain.—(*Lange.*)

Verses 37–43. In the very shapes and colours of brute creatures there is a Divine hand, which disposeth them to His own ends. Small and unlikely means shall prevail where God intends an effect. Little peeled sticks of hazel or poplar laid in the troughs, shall enrich Jacob with an increase of his spotted flocks, Laban's sons might have tried the same means and failed. God would have Laban know that He put a difference between Jacob and him; that as for fourteen years He had multiplied Jacob's charge of cattle to Laban, so now, for the last six years, He would multiply Laban's flock to Jacob, and if Laban had the more, yet the better were Jacob's.—(*Bishop Hall.*)

The attainment of varieties and new species among animals and plants is very ancient, and stands closely connected with civilization and the kingdom of God.—(*Lange.*)

As regards the morality, however, Jacob seems to have bargained with his secret scheme in view, and consulted only his own interest and avarice, the effect of which was to secure a large portion of the flocks. Laban, discovering this, regarded himself as released from the compact, and changed the terms time after time. This loss to Laban was only a providential punishment for his exaction of Jacob's service those fourteen years. But Jacob was guilty in relying more upon craft than upon the covenant of God.—(*Jacobus.*)

CHAPTER XXXI.

Critical Notes.—7. Changed my wages ten times.] Probably to be understood as a round number, meaning any number of times—as often as he could. The expression "ten times" is used for frequently, in Num. xiv. 22, and in other passages.—**11. The Angel of God.]** This is, as elsewhere, the angel or messenger who speaks in the person of God himself. (verse 13). **19. Images.]** Heb. *Teraphim.* "This word occurs fifteen times in the Old Testament. It appears three times in this chapter, and nowhere else in the Pentateuch. It is always in the plural number. The teraphim were symbols or representatives of the deity. They seem to have been busts of the human form, sometimes as large as life. (1 Sam. xix. 13.) The employment of them in the worship of God which Laban seems to have inherited from his fathers (Josh. xxiv. 2), is denounced as idolatry (1 Sam. xv. 23); and hence they are classed with the idols and other abominations put away by Josiah. (2 Kings xxiii. 24.) (*Murphy.*)—**34 The camel's furniture.]** "This was a pack-saddle, in the recesses of which articles might be deposited, and on which was a seat or couch for the rider." (*Murphy.*)—**40. In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night.]** In the East the hotter the day, the colder the night. (Jer. xxxvi. 30; Ps. cxxi. 6.)—**42. The fear of Isaac.]** "This is used as a name of God in His covenant relation. He who is the object of Isaac's fear or reverential awe; like the Hope of Israel." (Jer. xiv. 8.) There is a similar use of the word "fear" as an *object* of fear, in Ps. xxxi. 11.; Prov. i. 26, 27.—**Rebuked thee.]**—"*Judged thee*, by giving forewarning against violent language." (*Jacobus.*)—**47. And Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha; but Jacob called it Galeed.]** "It is remarkable that in giving these names Laban chooses the Chaldee, Jacob the Hebrew, for the same meaning, *the heap of witness.*" *(Alford.)*—"These words are the oldest testimony that in Mesopotamia, the mother country of the Patriarchs, Aramaic or Chaldee was spoken; while in Canaan, the country of Jacob's birth, Hebrew was the vernacular. And hence we may conclude that Abraham's family had adopted the Hebrew from the Canaanites (*i.e.*, the Phœnicians.)" *(Keil.)*—**49. Mizpah.]** A watch-tower or beacon. "The pile of stones was to be not only a memorial but a sort of *look out*—when they should be absent from each other—keeping watch upon each of them for their fidelity." *(Jacobus.)* There were several places bearing this name in Palestine. (1 Sam. vii. 5-16; Josh. xv. 28; xi. 3-8.)—**53. The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob sware by the fear of his father Isaac.]** "Laban calls to witness the Gods (the verb is in the plural in the original) of Abraham and Nahor and their father Terah; but Jacob swears only by the true God, Him whom Isaac, his father, feared." *(Alford.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verse 1-21.

Jacob's Departure for Canaan.

I. It was hastened by persecution. Laban's sons began to envy the prosperity of Jacob. They are sure that his riches have come out of their father's estate, and suggest that he has employed unfair means. (Verse 1.) Such is that spirit of envy which cannot bear to see another thrive. Laban was also of the same mind as his sons, and his conduct towards Jacob had become quite altered. (Verse 2.) Jacob foresaw the coming storm of persecution, and made up his mind to avoid it by flight.

II. It was prompted by a sense of offended justice. Jacob consults with his wives upon the situation of his affairs, complains of their father's unjust treatment and of his changed manner towards himself. He had served their father faithfully for many years, and yet he had often been deceived and defrauded in the matter of wages. (Verse 17.) Laban had agreed to a bargain, and now is displeased at the result. Jacob ascribes his prosperity, not to himself alone, but to God. (Verse 9.) His wives agree that Jacob's cause is just. They confess that their father had treated them shamefully. They were little better than slaves. (Verse 14–16.) These continued acts of injustice could be tolerated no longer. Jacob's righteous soul must rise up against this unjust oppression and shake it off.

III. It was at the command of God. There were prudential reasons why Jacob should suddenly quit the service of his uncle, but he justifies his conduct by alleging that he was acting by the express command of God. (Verse 13.) The Lord was making good his old promise "to be with Jacob, and keep him in all places whither he went." The time arrives when the word of God becomes to us more than a general promise or command, when it summons us to some special duty. Jacob's way was now plain, as he had clear divine direction. By this command of God it was intended to make Jacob feel that he was but a stranger and pilgrim here, and that this world was not his rest. Trials are sent to us so that we may not make this world our home. They are to us the voice of God telling us that here "we have no continuing city."

IV. It illustrates the imperfections as well as the virtues of Jacob's character. It was right in Jacob to avoid persecution by flight, to feel keenly the injustice done to him, and above all to obey the command of God that he should return to his kindred. But in carrying out these high principles of duty, Jacob reveals the inherent faults of his character. He "stole away unawares." (Verse 20.) He practises his wily arts, as of old, pretending all the while as if he would remain, when he knew that he had arranged for sudden flight. The assertion of his own rights was, regarded in itself, noble, and yet it is marred by deceit. God's commandment is good, but man's obedience is marked by many flaws.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. How often what a man *hears* said of him determines his course in life! This was probably a report to him of what his cousins had said, as they were three days' journey distant. They were dissatisfied with Jacob's large share of the flocks, and no wonder. He had gotten so much of their father's property, and all with nothing of his own to start with, that they are incensed, and intimate that there must be the *overreaching* of Jacob in it all.—(*Jacobus.*)

All this glory. That is, all this wealth, which easily begets glory; and goes, therefore, joined with it. (Prov. iii. 16; viii. 18.) This *regina pecunia* doth all, and hath all, here below, saith Solomon, (Eccl. x. 19.) Money beareth the mastery, and is the monarch of this world.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 2. As the wicked have no peace with God, so the godly have no peace with men; for if they prosper not they are despised, if they prosper they are envied.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

He said little, for shame, but thought the more, and could not so conceal his discontent, but that it appeared in his lowering looks. And this was plain to Jacob by his countenance, which had been friendly, smooth, and smiling, but now he was cloudy, sad, spiteful. The young men could not hold or hide what was in their heart, but blurted it out and spake their minds freely. This old fox held his tongue, but could not keep his countenance.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 3. Like a watchful friend at his right hand, the Lord observes his treatment, and warns him to depart. In all our removals it becomes us to act as that we may hope for the Divine presence and blessing to attend us; else, though we may flee from one trouble, we shall fall into many, and be less able to endure them.—(*Fuller.*)

Laban's frowns were a grief to Jacob; the Lord calls upon him, therefore, to look homeward. Let the world's affronts, and the change of men's countenances, drive us to Him who changeth not; and mind us of heaven where is a perpetual serenity and sweetness.—(*Trapp.*)

To the godly, all the changes and afflictions of life are Divine calls to the true home of their souls.

Verse 4. He called his wives, the daughters of Laban, and explained to them the whole case, and appeals to their knowledge of the facts, and declares the favour of God towards him. Observe—(1.) The case is clear for his return when God so commands. (2.) He shows himself to be a kind and faithful husband.—(*Jacobus.*)

He sends for his wives into the field, where he might converse with them freely on the subject, without danger of being overheard. Had they been servants, it would have been sufficient to have imparted to them his will; but, being wives, they require a different treatment. There is an authority which Scripture and nature give the man over the woman; but everyone who deserves the name of a man will exercise it with a gentleness and kindness that shall render it pleasant rather than burdensome. He will consult with her as a friend, and satisfy her by giving the reasons of his conduct. Thus did Jacob to both his wives, who by such conduct forgot the differences between themselves, and cheerfully cast in their lot with him. —(*Fuller.*)

Verse 5. This is the world's wages. All Jacob's good service is now forgotten. Do an unthankful person nineteen kindnesses, unless you add the twentieth all is lost. "Very rarely grateful men are found," saith Cicero. "No one writes a benefit in the calendar," saith Seneca.—(*Trapp.*)

It is wisely ordered that the countenance shall, in most cases, be an index to the heart; else there would be much more deception in the world than there is. Sullen silence is often less tolerable than contention itself, because the latter, painful as it is, affords opportunity for mutual explanation. But while Jacob had to complain of Laban's cloudy countenance, he could add, "The God of my father hath been with me." The smiles of God are the best support under the frowns of men. If we walk in the light of *His* countenance we need not fear what man can do unto us.—(*Bush.*)

Verses 6, 7. How often men reprove in others the very wrong of which they are guilty themselves. Often God punishes sin in kind, allowing the deceiver to be deceived.—(*Jacobus.*)

Laban, the churl, the richer he grew by him, the harder he was to him; like children with mouthfuls and handfuls, who will yet rather spoil all, than part with any. It is the *love*, not the *lack* of money that makes men churls. —(*Trapp*).

Verses 8–10. Jacob, we are to remember, left his hire to the providence of God. He thought himself bound at the same time to use all legitimate means for the attainment of the desired end. His expedients may have been perfectly legitimate in the circumstances, but they were evidently of no avail without the Divine blessing. And they would become wholly ineffectual when his wages were changed. Hence he says, God took the cattle and gave them to me. (*Murphy*).

Verses 11–13. When at Bethel, the Lord said, *I am Jehovah, God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac.* He might have said the same now; but it was His pleasure to direct the attention of His servant to the *last*, and to him the most interesting of His manifestations. By giving him hold of the last link in the chain, he would be in possession of the whole. In directing Jacob's thoughts to the vision at Bethel, the Lord reminds him of those solemn acts of his own, by which he had at that time devoted himself. It is not only necessary that we be reminded of God's promises for our support in troubles, but of our own solemn engagements, so that in all our movements we may keep the end in view for which we live. The object of the vow was, that *Jehovah should be his God*; and whenever he should return, that *stone should be God's house.* And now that the Lord commands him to return, He reminds him of his vow. He must not go to Canaan with a view to promote his own temporal interest, but to introduce the knowledge and worship of the true God. This was the great end which Jehovah had in view in all that he did for Abraham's posterity, and they must never lose sight of it.—(*Fuller.*)

Verse 14. By "portion" is to be understood such voluntary gifts and presents as he might be induced to make to them; and by "inheritance," that to which they might expect to succeed by law or common usage.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 15. Instead of dealing with us as daughters, disposing of us with honourable dowries, he has bargained us away like slaves, and applied the proceeds to his own use, instead of bestowing any portion of it upon us. The "selling" was Laban's compact with Jacob for fourteen years' service. As this service was in lieu of a dowry, which would naturally have accrued to the wives as a right, they jointly complain of being excluded from all participation in the avails of it. Their crimination of their father is not to be reckoned a breach of filial reverence, for they are not traducing him in the presence of strangers, but merely stating the reason which justified them to their own consciences in leaving him.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 16. As to their acknowledging the hand of God in giving their father's riches to their husband, this is no more than is often seen in the most selfish characters, who can easily admire the Divine providence when it goes in their favour.—(*Fuller.*)

Verses 17, 18. The people in the East prepare for an entire removal with great expedition. In a quarter of the time which it would take a poor family in England to get the furniture of a single room ready for removal, the tents of a large encampment will have been struck, and, together with all the movables and provisions, packed away upon the backs of camels, mules, or asses; and the whole party will be on its way, leaving, to use an expression of their own, not a halter nor a rag behind.—(*Bush.*)

Verses 19–21. It is not the business of Scripture to acquaint us with the kinds and characteristics of false worship. Hence we know little of the teraphim, except they were employed by those who professed to worship the true God. Rachel had a lingering attachment to these objects of her family's superstitious reverence, and secretly carried them away as relics of a home she was to visit no more, and as sources of safety to herself against the perils of her flight.

It is hardly probable that Rachel intended, by a pious and fanatical theft, to free her father from idolatry, for then she would have thrown the images away. She appears to have stolen them with the superstitious idea that she would prevent her father from consulting them as oracles, and under their guidance from overtaking and destroying Jacob. She attributed to the images a certain magical, though not religious, power (perhaps as oracles). The very lowest and most degrading supposition is that she took the images, often overlaid with silver, or precious metals, from mercenary motives. Jacob himself had at first a low rather than a strict conscience in regard to these images (Ch. xxxv. 2), but the stricter view prevails since the time of Moses (Ex. xx.; Josh. xxiv. 2, 14.) The tendency was always hurtful, and they were ultimately rooted out from Israel. Laban had lapsed into a more corrupt form of religion, and his daughters had not escaped the infection.—(*Lange.*)

It is not a chance that we meet here in the idols of Laban the earliest traces of idolatry in the Old World, although they had doubtless existed elsewhere much earlier and in a proper form. We can see how Polytheism gradually developed itself out of the symbolic image worship of Monotheism. (Rom. i. 23.) Moreover, the teraphim are estimated entirely from a theocratic point of view. They could be stolen as other household furniture (have eyes but see not). They could be hidden under a camel's saddle. They are a contemptible nonentity, which can render no assistance. The zeal for gods and idols is always fanatical. —*(Lange.)*

The teraphim were used for two reasons: first for the purposes of divination and fortune telling; but secondly for the deeper reason of the inseparable tendency in human nature to worship God under a form. Wherein lay the guilt of this? Not in worshipping God under a form, for we cannot worship Him otherwise; but in this—that the form was necessarily inadequate and false, and therefore gave a false conception of God. There are but two forms in which we, as Christians, are allowed to worship God; to worship Him through the universe, and through the humanity of Jesus Christ.—*(Robertson.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 22–42.

LABAN'S EXPOSTULATION WITH JACOB, AND JACOB'S DEFENCE.

I. Laban's Expostulation with Jacob. Jacob stole away "unawares," taking with him his family, goods, and cattle. Laban, who overtook him, after seven days' pursuit, complains of his conduct and expostulates with him. 1. *There was, apparently, cause for just complaint.* (1.) *There were some criminal elements in the conduct of Jacob.* Laban complains that he had not only committed a serious moral fault, but also something of the nature of a crime and violent wrong against society. He accuses Jacob of acting like a thief in carrying off his daughters as booty. (Verse 26.) (2.) *There was unkindness and a breach of social obligations.* Jacob by his conduct in this matter had denied Laban the opportunity of taking affectionate leave of his daughters. He had sinned against the tender charities of domestic life, and neglected his plain duty towards the family with whom he had cast his lot. (Verses 27, 28.) 2. *But this complaint was, really, the disguise of Laban's own evil nature.* Thus Laban complains that he had been robbed, when he was only envious and suspicious. Men are often that very thing themselves which they suspect in others. And they are quick to spy those very faults in others for which they themselves are notorious. Laban's affection for his daughters was only a pretence. Consider his conduct towards them while they dwelt with him. He had kept them penniless, and now he wants to dismiss them with a generous feast. (Verses 14, 15, 27.) He is also passionate and revengeful while he appears to be pious. He asserts that his superior power puts Jacob at his mercy, but that he is restrained from hurting him by God's injunction. (Verse 29.) But all this time he feels the passion of revenge burning within him, as if he would say to Jacob,—"I could crush you if I pleased, only that God has forbidden me."

II. Jacob's Defence. 1. *He challenges proof of his dishonesty.* He asserts that there was no ground for these accusations. Nothing was found in his possession that he had wrongly taken. (Verse 37). 2. *He appeals to many many years of faithful and honest service.* He had been scrupulous in his attention to every duty. Throughout his long service he had maintained a high sense of justice, and had even suffered loss himself rather than run the risk of committing a wrong, (Verses 38, 39). He had led a hard and trying life. (Verse 40). And all this was the more praiseworthy, as it was for a bad and unthankful master. Jacob, in truth, owed nothing to Laban. He had fairly earned all that he had received. He had served Laban for twenty years, fourteen years of these for his two daughters, and six for the cattle. And all this time Laban had treated him with manifest injustice, changing his wages as often as he had the chance. (Verse 41). And only for the special favour of God, Jacob would have nothing, even now. (Verse 42). He could appeal to the fact that God was on his side, who had seen his affliction and rebuked his oppressor. (Verse 42).

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 22, 23. He heard of it no earlier on account of the distance that intervened between his flocks and Jacob's (compare ch. xxx, 36 with ch. xxxi, 19). But no sooner does he hear of his son-in-law's abrupt departure, than he collects a sufficient force from among his kinsmen and adherents, and sets out in hot pursuit of him. It is easy to see from this with what reception a formal request or proposal to be dismissed from his service that he might return to Canaan would have met at the hand of Laban. The patriarch was no doubt fully satisfied in his own mind that he must leave his employer clandestinely if he left him at all.—(*Bush*).

Verse 24. Such communications were anciently made to man independently of their moral character. The Divine influence, which makes known the will of God, or the coming events of His providence, is entirely different from that which is put forth in the renewal of men's characters, and making them heirs of eternal life. Accordingly, we find such men as Abimelech, Laban, Balaam, and Nebuchadnezzar, made on particular occasions, and for particular purposes, the recipients of Divine revelations.—(*Bush*).

Verse 25. Seeing Laban so near, he set himself in as good order as he could, fearing the worst. But God was better to him than his fears. He spake for him, and so He can and doth oft for us in the hearts of our enemies. (Is. xli. 9.)—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 26. Part of this accusation was unjust. The daughters of Laban had gone, of their own free will, with Jacob, and he had a right to take them with him.

The unjust and the oppressive are the most forward to question sharply the conduct of others.

Verse 27. The Easterns used to set out, at least on their long journeys, with music and valedictory songs. If we consider them, as they probably were, used not on common, but more solemn occasions, there appears peculiar propriety in the complaint of Laban.—(*Harmer.*)

Verse 28. His words are obviously full of hypocrisy and cant. However he may talk about his children and grandchildren, that which lay nearest his heart was the substance which Jacob had taken with him, and which he, no doubt, meant in some way to recover. But he acts the part of thousands, who, when galled by an evil conscience, endeavour to ease themselves of its reproaches by transferring the blame from themselves to the persons they have wronged.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 29. Truth will in the end make itself to appear, whatever may have been the disguises in which it was wrapped. Laban here virtually acknowledges the violent purpose with which he had undertaken the pursuit; but in the same breath he would fain make a merit of abstaining from the harm which he meditated. He would impress Jacob that he acted very religiously in paying so much deference to the warning voice of Jacob's God. Thus do men sometimes vainly magnify as a virtue that which is imposed upon them through sheer necessity.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 30. Goodly gods that could not save themselves from the thief. (Jer. x. 5, 11, 15.) Joseph suffered as a dishonest person; Elisha, as a troubler of the State; Jeremiah, as a traitor; Luther, as the trumpet of rebellion.—(*Trapp.*)

It must have gone sore against the heart of Jacob when he found that he was accused of stealing idols which he abhorred as an abomination.

Verses 31, 32. With respect to the reiterated complaints of the *secrecy* of his departure, Jacob answers all in a few words. It was, "because I was afraid," etc. This was admitting his power, but impeaching his justice; and as *he* had dwelt only upon the taking away of his daughters, so *Jacob* in answer confines himself to them. With respect to the goods, his answer is expressive of the strongest indignation. He will not deign to disown the charge; but desires that all his company might be searched. It was worthy of an upright man to feel indignant at the charge of stealing, and of a servant of God at that of stealing *idols.* But unless he had been as well assured of the innocence of all about him, as he was of his own, he ought not to have spoken as he did. His words might have proved a sorer trial to him than he was aware of.—(*Fuller.*)

It is wise not to be too confident in the goodness of those connected with us. Hasty speech may work much woe. How sorry would Jacob have been if Laban had found the images under Rachel, and taken him at his word! What a snare befel Jephthah by his rash speaking! Let, therefore, thy words be few, true, and ponderous. —(*Trapp.*)

Verses 33, 34. *Kitto* thinks that it was under the common pack-saddle of the camel, which is high, and shaped so as to suit the ridge of the camel's back; and that under this, or among the shawls, cloaks and rugs which are used to make the saddle easy for women, the teraphim were concealed. There was room enough under this for the small teraphim, or *busts* of human form, and Rachel, cunning as ever, did not lack a device and pretence to give her success. Laban could not think that in such circumstances she would sit upon his gods.—(*Jacobus.*)

Jacob finds himself pursued, accused, and searched. How painful to a man conscious of innocence! How little confidence Laban had in his veracity!

Verse 35. This apology was very necessary according to existing usages and feelings in the East, which inculcate the greatest external deference on the part of the children towards their parents. In Quintus Curtius, Alexander is represented as saying to the queen mother of Persia, "Understanding that it is in Persia considered a great offence for a son to be seated in the presence of his mother unless by her permission, I have always in my visits to you remained standing till you authorised me to sit."—(*Bush.*)

Verse 36. A righteous man may feel unjust imputations keenly, and defend himself with the warmth and courage inspired by conscious innocence. The difficulty is to keep the storm, even of a noble passion, from stirring up evil. (Eph. iv. 26.)

Jacob now takes greater boldness, grows indignant, and retorts upon Laban with the sharpest crimination. He demands now the cause of such hot pursuit, and the ground of such severe accusations, which he could not at all prove. Little did Jacob dream of what Rachel had done, and of how the search might have turned the tables against him to the triumph of Laban. He had better not have been quite so sure of the innocence of all his family. Alas! he thinks they could do no such wrong; but he should rather not so freely offer the wrong-doer's life as a forfeit.—(*Jacobus.*)

Verse 37. See the confidence of a clear conscience! Happy is he that can be acquitted by himself in private; in public by others; in both by God. —(*Trapp.*)

Verse 38. Jacob's fidelity in this respect will appear more striking when contrasted with the opposite conduct of shepherds, whose neglected duties and abused functions are so graphically portrayed by the prophet. (Ezek. xxxiv. 1–5.)—(*Bush.*)

Verses 39–41. When one can show that he has been faithful, upright, and diligent in his office, he can stand up with a clear conscience and assert his innocence. A good conscience and a gracious God gives one boldness and consolation.—(*Lange.*)

In many parts of Asia very severe and even frosty nights are, even in winter, succeeded by very warm days; and it may be said, indeed, that the only experience of what we should call winter weather which the inhabitants obtain, is exclusively during the night-time. (*Pictorial Bible.*) Mr. Bruce, the Abyssinian traveller, lost all his camels by the cold in one night in the deserts of Senaar; and Volney relates an affecting story of a hapless wanderer who was like Jacob frozen by the north wind at night, and burnt by the dreadful heat of the sun by day. (Jer. xxxvi. 30.)—(*Bush.*)

Verse 42. Laban had made a merit of obeying the dream, but Jacob shows that this Divine visitation was in itself an evidence of his evil designs. God intended thereby to rebuke him, and thus to plead the cause of the injured.

God is the perpetual and sure portion of His departed saints, and an object of holy fear to His saints on earth.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 43-55.

Laban's Covenant with Jacob.

Laban himself proposes this covenant, and imparts to it the sanctions of religion (verses 49–53). But—

I. It was forced upon him by circumstances. This was no expression of a friendship which needed not an outward sign, but was rather an expedient to save further trouble. It was wrung from Laban by the hard necessity of his position. He had been in a great rage against Jacob, but now his temper is cooled. The circumstances which tamed his spirit, and brought him to a better mind were these:—1. *His long journey in pursuit of Jacob.* He pursued after him seven days' journey (verse 23). Physical toil, the continued strain of anxiety, the proved impossibility of inflicting vengeance,—all these tend to cool passion. 2. *The Divine warning.* God had appeared to Laban charging him that he should do no violence to Jacob (verse 29). This warning was really of the nature of a rebuke (verse 42). 3. *His failure to criminate Jacob.* He had charged Jacob with theft, and after a fruitless search, was mortified at finding no evidence of crime. 4. *The overwhelming force of Jacob's self-defence* (verses 36–42). Jacob recites the evidence of his faithful and laborious service for twenty years, and the facts to which he appealed could not be gainsaid. The truth of his reproaches against Laban was but too evident.

II. It showed an imperfect sense of religious duty and obligation. When it comes to the point, Laban cannot find it in his heart to do anything against his own flesh and blood. (Verse 43.) The natural feelings of a father prevail. Laban and Jacob enter into a covenant. They set up a heap and call it Mizpah; "for he said, the Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent one from another" (Verse 49.) But 1. *The natural love of kindred may exist apart from piety.* The social affections are beautiful in themselves, but they may be exercised by those who have very imperfect notions of religion, or who even set it aside altogether. 2. *The forms of religion may be used with but an imperfect recognition of their real significance.* The setting up of this pillar, and the pious motto attached to it, seemed to indicate a most sacred friendship and a solemn regard to the realities of religion. The all-pervading presence and the power of God were recognised. God is regarded as One to whom men are ultimately accountable. But this transaction, though employing the sanctions of religion, shows but a very low apprehension of its nature. This heap was set up by enemies who called upon God to protect them, each from the encroachments of the other. They seemed to think that the chief work of the Almighty in this world was to make them happy, to guard their interests, to avenge their private wrongs. They think little of God's glory, or of their own perfection in godliness. This is a mean and selfish view of religion.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 43. Laban wishes to adjust matters in the best way he can. He cannot help prefacing his wish, however, by another sample of vain boasting and affected generosity. He attempts no defence against the charge of having repeatedly altered the terms of contract with Jacob, nor will conscience allow him to deny his secret purpose of sending him away empty. But this strange mixture of avarice, cunning, and effrontery is not without its parallel in every age and country.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 44. "A fool is full of words," saith Solomon. Laban likewise talks a great deal here. A covenant he will have, a pillar he will have, a heap he will have; and that heap shall be a witness, and that pillar a witness, and God a witness, and a Judge too. There is no end of his discourse. The basest things are ever the most plentiful, so the least worth yields the most words. —(*Trapp.*)

Jacob makes no reply to Laban's boasting, but lets it pass; and though he had felt so keenly and spoken so warmly, yet he consents to a covenant of peace. His resentment is under the control of his moral principle. He said nothing, but expressed his mind by actions.—(*Bush.*)

Verses 46, 47. *Jegarsahadutha.* Here is the first decided specimen of Aramaic, as contra-distinguished from Hebrew. Its incidental appearance indicates a fully formed dialect known to Jacob, and distinct from his own. *Gilead*, or Galeed remains to this day in Jebel Jel'ad, though the original spot was further north.—(*Murphy.*)

Verses 48, 49. The Lord takes cognisance of the conduct of men when they are absent one from another. The Most High is above all, and sees all.

The power of religion is extremely weak in our minds if the consideration of the all-seeing eye of Jehovah does not operate more strongly to restrain us from evil than the presence of the world of mortal men.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 50. Men are sometimes so situated that they are thrown upon their personal honour and fidelity, having no outward compulsion to make them do what is right. The only firm support for such honour is the practical recognition of the presence of a just and holy God.

This sentiment shews that some knowledge of the true God was extensively prevalent at that early period, though in Laban's case it did not avail to extinguish the relics of his idolatrous propensities. Like thousands of others, he "held the truth in unrighteousness." —(*Bush.*)

Verses 51–53. We are surprised to hear that a man who had been seven days in pursuit of certain stolen gods, speak so much, and in so solemn a manner about Jehovah: but wicked men will on some occasions utter excellent words. After all, he could not help manifesting his attachment to idolatry. When speaking to Jacob of Jehovah, he calls Him "the God of *your* father," in a manner as if He was not *his* God. He does not appear to have invoked Jehovah as the *only* true God. It is very observable, that though he makes mention of "the God of Abraham," yet it is in connection with "Nahor," and their father, *i.e.* Terah: but when Abraham was with Nahor and Terah, they were idolaters. (Josh. xxiv. 2). "The God of Abraham, and Nahor, and Terah," were words capable of very ill construction. Nor does Jacob appear to be ignorant of Laban's design in thus referring to their early ancestors; and therefore, that he might bear an unequivocal testimony against all idolatry, even that of Abraham in his younger years, he would swear only by "the fear of his father Isaac," who had never worshipped any other than the true God. It were worth while for those who plead for *antiquity* as a mark of the true Church to consider that herein they follow the example of Laban, and not of Jacob.—(*Fuller.*)

Verses 54, 55. Laban had professed his regret that he had not an opportunity to enjoy a day of feasting and of mirth at parting with his children. Such a parting would hardly have been seemly, even in a family which had no fear of God before their eyes. Jacob, however, makes a *religious* feast previous to the departure of his father-in-law. "He offered sacrifices upon the Mount Galeed." Laban departed, and this parting proved final. We hear no more of Laban, nor of the family of Nahor. They might, for several ages retain some knowledge of Jehovah; but mixing with it the superstitions of the country, they would in the end sink into gross idolatry, and be lost among the heathen.—(*Fuller.*)

Laban imitated the corruptions of his ancestors, some of whom were good men and had knowledge of the true God. His descendants followed his example unto greater corruption, until the knowledge of God was, at length, lost. This religious degeneration is often seen in families and nations.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Critical Notes.—**1. The angels of God met him.]** "Lit., came, drew near to him, not precisely that they came from an opposite direction." (*Lange.*)—**2. Mahanaim.]** Heb. Two camps. Probably alluding to the meeting of his own encampment with that of God. But some contend that this is the usual Hebrew plural of dignity or majesty. Mahanaim was situated S.W. of Mizpah in Gilead, probably the modern Mahneh.—**3. The land of Seir.]** This is Arabia Petrea, on the east and south of the Dead Sea.—**7. Greatly afraid and distressed.]** Heb. "Straitened." In the Scriptures this word denotes "a sore strait," from which there seems to be no way of escape. *Two bands.* "The word *Mahanah* (see verse 2) is used throughout these verses as signifying the parts of Jacob's company, and ought to have been carefully preserved in the A.V., as it is by the LXX. It is caprice of this kind, rendering the word "*host*" in verse 2, "*band*" in verse 7, and "*company*" in verse 8, which has so obscured the meaning of Scripture for English readers." (*Alford.*)—**10. I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies.]** Heb. *I am less than all the mercies*; *i.e.*, I am too little for them. *Of all the truth, which Thou hast shown unto Thy servant.* Heb. *The truth which Thou hast done.* In Scripture truth is represented as something which may be *done* or *acted*, as well as *spoken*. (St. John iii. 21; 1 John i. 6.) *With my staff I passed over this Jordan.* (*Onk.*)—*By myself alone I crossed over this Jordan*—**11. The mother with the children.]** "These words, like '*root and branch*,' betoken utter extirpation of a family or a community: compare Hosea x. 14." (*Alford.*)—**13. Took of that which came to his hand.]** The usage of the Heb. implies, not as the A.V., that which came uppermost, but rather that which he possessed,—which he had previously acquired. **22. The ford Jabbok.]** "Nearly the same word as is rendered *wrestled* in (verse 24), from which the brook may have derived its name. This brook is the *Zerka,* and empties into the Jordan on the east side, a distance below the sea of Galilee." (*Jacobus*). The brook at the ford is about ten yards wide.—**24. Wrestled.]** The Heb. word only occurs in this place. It seems to be derived from a word signifying "dust," and the allusion is probably to the dust excited by the combatants in wrestling. **A man.** In Hosea xii. 4. 5, the *man* who wrestled with Jacob is called *the angel,* and the Lord of Hosts. In verse 30, Jacob calls him *God.* **25. The hollow of his thigh.]** "Lit., the socket of the hip. It is not said that he struck it a blow (Knobel) (for it is God who is spoken of); needs but to touch its object, and the full result is secured." (*Lange*). *And the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint.* "This is explained more fully in verse 34. The sinews of his thigh (*nervus ischiadicus*) were paralyzed through the extreme tension and distortion. But this bodily paralysis does not paralyze the persevering Jacob." (*Lange*). **28. Israel.]** Signifies, "princely prevailer with God." One part of the word signifies the same as the name *Sarah,* "princess." Such names in Scripture designate the character, rather than the common appellation of those to whom they are applied. (Isa. ix. 6; vii. 14). See also what our Lord says to His disciples, (St. John xv. 15) *As a prince hast thou power with God.* The same word occurs in Hosea xii. 4; "He had power with God"; where the Heb. has, "*he was a prince with God.*" **30. Peniel.]** Heb. "face of God," called also *Penuel,* in verse 31. But the two words have precisely the same import. **32. Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank.]** This custom is not mentioned elsewhere in the O.T., but the Jews rigidly observe it unto this day. Delitzsch says, 'This exemption exists still, but since the ancients did not distinguish clearly between muscle, vein, and nerve, the sinew is now generally understood, *i.e.* the interior cord and nerve of the so-called hind-quarter, including the exterior also, and the ramifications of both."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1, 2.

Jacob's Visible and Invisible World.

I. Jacob's visible world. He had just escaped the persecutions of his father-in-law, and was now expecting to meet with a fiercer enemy in his brother. All was dread and anxiety. He is scarcely delivered from one host of enemies when another is coming forth to meet him. Such was the gloomy and hopeless condition of the outward world as it appeared to Jacob's natural eye.

II. Jacob's invisible world. What a different scene is presented to him when his spiritual eye is opened, and God permits him to see those invisible forces which were engaged on his side. We are told that "the angels of God met him." He was weak to all human appearance; but he was really strong, for God's host had come to deliver him from any host of men that might oppose. So far as we know, the angels of God have only appeared to man in times of great danger. Thus, when the host of the Syrians encompassed Dothan in order to take Elisha, the servant of the prophet was alarmed, and cried out, "Alas! Master, how shall we do?" And the prophet's assuring answer was, "Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." (2 Kings vi. 17). There was no visible help, no earthly powers to protect the prophet, but in answer to his prayer, "the young man's eyes were opened, and he saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." God's hosts stood revealed to allay the fear of man's hosts. So it was in Jacob's case. The host of God is described as parting into two bands, as if to protect him behind and before; or to assure him that as he had been delivered from one enemy, so he would be delivered from another enemy, which was coming forth to meet him. Thus Jacob was taught—1. *To whom he owed his late mercies.* 2. *The true source of his protection.* 3. *His faith is confirmed.* It is justified for the past, and placed upon a firmer basis for the future.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. As the angels appeared to him in a dream on his way to Laban, so now they appear to him more visibly on his return home. This sight is assuring, like that vision of the ladder, which he had seen twenty years before, traversed by the angel guards. Here they are encamped around him. (Ps. xxxiv. 8). The promise made to him that he should be returned to his own land in peace was to be made good. (Gen. xxviii. 15).—(*Jacobus.*)

Jacob here obtains a clear assurance of God's protection and guidance. We see, therefore, in him the union of two classes of feelings—fear for the future, and trust in God; and such must be ever our Christian life: not an entire life of rest, for we have sinned; nor an entire life of unrest, for God has forgiven us; but in all life a mixture of the two. Christ alone had perfect peace, for He had perfect purity.—(*Robertson.*)

Verse 2. Why the angels are called hosts. 1. From their multitude. 2. From their order. 3. From their power for the protection of the saints, and the resistance and punishment of the wicked. 4. From their rendering a cheerful obedience as become a warlike host.—(*Lange.*)

All God's children may call death, as Jacob did this place, Mahanaim; because there the angels meet them.—(*Trapp*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 3–23.

JACOB'S PREPARATION FOR MEETING HIS ANGRY BROTHER.

I. He took those measures dictated by human prudence. 1. *He sends messengers of peace.* Jacob had to pass through Mount Seir, where Esau had taken up his abode. He sends messengers to his brother to sue for peace and favour, in terms of great humility. They bring back the unfavourable report that Esau is coming with a band of men, as with hostile intent. Jacob now remembers his former sin. The very mention of his brother's name brings the past vividly before him. He must make no delay in conciliating his brother. The messengers are charged to use words of lowly submission. Esau is to be addressed as *lord*, Jacob not even insisting upon the temporal prerogatives of the birthright. He accepts a humiliating position. 2. *He divides his company into two bands.* This arrangement he carried out both with respect to his flocks and to his family. The manner in which he arranges the latter shows how he felt that the situation was desperate. He places in front the handmaids and their children, then Leah and hers, and lastly, the best beloved Rachel and Joseph. Those he cared for least he places the nearest to the danger. He was forced to consider the agonising question as to who he should be willing first to lose. 3. *He sends a present* to his brother. (Verses 13–15.) It is a liberal one, consisting of quite half the flocks he had acquired. (Verses 7, 8.) He puts a space between drove and drove, so as to make an effective impression of liberality upon his brother. Thus he hopes to appease his anger.

II. He took those measures dictated by religion. He betakes himself to prayer, which he utters in touching words. There are pious and noble elements in this prayer. 1. *He appeals to God as the Covenant God and Father.* (Verse 9.) 2. *He pleads God's gracious promise to himself.* "The Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." 3. *He confesses his own unworthiness, and God's goodness and faithfulness.* (Verse 10.) Twenty years ago, when he crossed over Jordan in his flight from Esau, his sole property was the staff he carried in his hand. Now, he is blessed with all this increase. He disclaims all merit of his own, and acknowledges that God's goodness had made him great. He also praised God for His "truth," *i.e.*, for His faithfulness. In the Scriptural usage of the term, God had "done" truth in fulfilling His word of promise. 4. *He presents his special petition expressing his present want.* (Verse 11.) He prays to be delivered from his brother's anger, the possible consequences of which were fearful to contemplate. 5. *He cleaves to God's word of promise.* (Verse 12.) God had promised to do him good, and to make his seed as the sand of the sea for multitude. And Jacob pleads as if he said, how could this promise be fulfilled if himself and his family were slain? This prayer shows the kind husband, the tender father, the man of faith and piety. There is an element of selfishness in it, for it was wrung from him by the dread of danger. But it is at such times that the soul is cast upon God. In the religious life, the highest motives come last. We begin first to turn to God from a sense of our danger.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 3–5. *Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau.* Observe in these conciliatory instructions to the messengers, (1) That he declines the honour of precedency given in the blessing, calling Esau *his lord.* Isaac had said to him, "Be *lord* over thy brethren." (Gen. xxvii. 29). But Jacob either understood it of spiritual ascendancy, or, if of temporal, as referring to his posterity, rather than to himself. He, therefore, assumes the air and language of deference to his brother as David did towards Saul, (1 Sam. xxiv. 7–9), from purely prudential considerations. (2). He would have him know that he was not come to claim the double portion, nor even to divide with him his father's inheritance. Now, as these were things which had so greatly provoked Esau, a relinquishment of them would tend more than anything else to conciliate him.—(*Bush*).

Jacob in this message mentioneth his property, that Esau might not think that he sought to him for any need; but only for his favour. And this was something, to a man of Esau's make; for such like not to hear of, or be haunted with, their poor kindred. (Luke xv. 30). "This thy son," saith he, that felt no want: he saith not, This my brother; he would not own him, because in poverty.—(*Trapp*).

Confidence in men mostly stands or falls with their fortunes.

Verse 6. This was a formidable force. Esau had begun to live by the sword (Gen. xxvii, 40), and had surrounded himself with a numerous body of followers. Associated by marriage with the Hittites and the Ishmaelites, he had rapidly risen to the rank of a powerful chieftain. It is vain to conjecture with what intent he advanced at the head of so large a retinue. It is probable that he was accustomed to a strong escort, that he wished to make an imposing appearance before his brother, and that his mind was in that wavering state, when the slightest incident might soothe him into good will, or arouse him to vengeance.—(*Murphy.*)

When Jacob was well rid of his father-in-law, he thought all safe; and his joy was completed by the sight of that army of angels. But he is damped and terrified with this sad message of Esau's approach and hostile intentions. This is the godly man's case while here. One trouble follows in the neck of another. Ripen we apace, and so get to heaven, if we would be out of the gun-shot. The ark was transportative till settled in Solomon's temple; so, till we come to heaven we shall be tossed up and down and turmoiled: whilst we are—as Bernard hath it—"in this exile, in this purgatory, in this pilgrimage, in this vale of tears"—(*Trapp.*)

Verses 7, 8. This fear of his brother was the direct consequence of his sin, the sin that embittered his whole life. —(*Robertson.*)

This was his weakness, and may be ours in like case, as looking to the present peril, and, "forgetting the consolation," as the apostle speaketh Heb. xii. 5, that he might have drawn from the promise of God, and presence of angels. Faith quelleth and killeth distrustful fears: but Satan, in a distress, hides from us that which should support us, and greatens that that may appal us.—(*Trapp.*)

The disposal of his company into two bands, so that if one was attacked the other might escape, is characteristic of Jacob. He was a scheming man, and never neglected to take every possible precaution.

Verse 9. He appeals to the God of Abraham and Isaac, to Jehovah the God of promise and performance.—(*Murphy.*)

We must not overlook the name of Jehovah in his prayer. The danger is so great that a more general belief in a general providence will not sustain him.—(*Hengstenberg.*)

Promises must be prayed over. God loves to be burdened with, and to be importuned in His own words; to be sued upon His own bond. Prayer is putting the promises into suit. Such prayers will be nigh the Lord day and night. (1 Kings viii. 59). He can as little deny them as deny Himself.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 10. Nothing is more humbling than the grace of God.—(*Starke.*)

Thankfulness was Jacob's distinguishing grace, as faith was Abraham's. Abraham appears ever to have been looking forward in *hope*,—Jacob looking back in *memory*; the one rejoicing in the future, the other in the past; the one making his way towards the promises, the other musing over their fulfilment.—(*J. H. Newman*).

With my staff, etc. That is, having nothing but a staff when I passed over this Jordan, I am now become so prosperous as to be able to divide my people, and my flocks and herds into these two large and imposing bands.—(*Bush*).

Jacob, though now grown so great, forgets not his former meanness.—(*Trapp*).

Verse 11. The literal rendering is, "the mother *upon* the children." It is founded upon what sometimes happens in the sacking of a city, when a devoted mother rushes between her child and the implement of death about to be plunged into its heart and is thus massacred *with* or *upon* her offspring. (Hos. x. 14.)—(*Bush.*)

Verse 12. So Jacob interprets that promise," I will be with thee," (Gen. xxviii. 15) which, indeed, hath in it whatsoever heart can wish, or need require. This promise was so sweet to the patriarch, that he repeats and ruminates it. God spake it once, he heard it twice; as David (Ps. lxii. 11) in another case. A fly can make little of a flower; but a bee will not be off till he hath the sweet thyme out of it. —(*Trapp*).

To remind God of His promises is one of the privileges of prayer.

Verses 13–16. The sum total of cattle selected for this purpose was five hundred and fifty; a most magnificent present for one in his circumstances. It was a striking proof of his high estimation of the covenant promise, that he was willing for its sake to forego so large a part of his possessions. Jacob here voluntarily subjects himself to so immense a loss, that he may purchase a secure return to the land of his inheritance.—(*Bush.*)

Verses 17–20. I almost think I hear Jacob telling his servants what they were to say to Esau. He would repeat it many times over, and then ask, "What did I say?" until he had completely *schooled* them into the story. When they went into the presence of Esau, they would be very particular in placing much stress on

Jacob's saying, "the present is sent unto my *lord!*" and this would touch his feelings.—(*Roberts.*)

Verses 21–23. He lodged that night; but lay upon thorns and had little rest. The master is the greatest servant in the house, and hath most business. Jacob "sent them over the brook," which he would not have done had he not been, upon his prayer, well confirmed and settled in his mind concerning the Lord's protection.—(*Trapp.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 24-32.

JACOB WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL.

Consider this incident:—**I. As to its outward form.** Jacob had sent his company on before, and is now left all alone. He entrusts his all to God on whom he had cast himself in prayer. A strange and mysterious being, having at first the form of a man, wrestles with him "until the breaking of the day." (verse 24). When this "man" saw that he prevailed not, he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh and put it out of joint. He confesses himself vanquished, and says, "let me go, for the day breaketh," (verse 26) when Jacob replies "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Jacob's unknown combatant asks his name, when he changes that name in commemoration of Jacob's power with God, and prevailing with men. Jacob then turns towards his unknown antagonist and asks what is *his* name. He blesses Jacob, but refuses to tell his *name.* (Verse 29.) This mysterious being is, at first called a "man," then an "angel," and then "God." When the conquest is over Jacob declares, "I have seen God face to face." (Verse 30). We cannot take this incident as a dream, but must regard it as history. For it is stated as a fact that the sinew of Jacob's thigh shrank (verse 32). The features of this incident are true to all what we know of Jacob's character. He had been a taker of the heel from his very birth. He had contended successfully with adversaries. True to his character, he struggles with this mysterious combatant while any strength remains. And even when his strength is suddenly withered, he hangs upon his conquerer. He learns to depend upon one mightier than himself.

II. As to its spiritual meaning. This transaction is clearly intended to have a spiritual meaning. If the outward form of it seems strange to us, we must consider that God can adapt the mode in which He shall convey His revelation to the condition of the person receiving it. When God has things of a spiritual nature to reveal, it is not strange that He should begin with the senses. God takes man on the ground on which He finds him, and through the senses leads him to the higher things of reason, of conscience, of faith, and of communion with Himself. These are some of the spiritual truths and lessons to be learned from this incident:—1. *That the great struggle of life is to know and feel after God.* We know that we are in the hands of some mysterious and mighty Power. We want to know the secret of that Power, and who is that mysterious Being behind it all. Truly to know God's name is to know the meaning of it, and not merely the ability to recite words. With the Hebrews of the old time, names stood for realities. To know God's name was to know His nature. This is our great struggle—our deepest desire. Jacob now stood in dread of his brother Esau, but says not a word regarding his danger. He requests only to be blest by God, and to know His nature. We, too, feel that this universe reposes upon a solemn mystery, and we ask, what is that Name above every name; who is that Being in whom all things have their beginning, and seek their end? Are all our aspirations after God and immortality, only the echo of our own minds and wishes; or, are they some living being outside of us? 2. *That God reveals Himself through mystery and awe.* The Divine antagonist seemed anxious to depart before the dawn, but Jacob held him, as if in fear, lest the daylight should rob him of the blessing. The darkness of the night was the favourable time. The light of day might dissolve the charm. God is felt more in awe and wonder than in clear conceptions. We feel God most when some dark mystery presses upon us. Darkness shows us more of God than the light. The infinite grandeur of heaven strikes us more by night than by day. 3. *That God reveals Himself to us in blessing.* God refused to tell Jacob His *Name*, but "He blessed him there." This is the chief thing we want. Through blessing imparted to us we shall learn all of that great Name that we can possibly know. If we depend only on words, we may come to mistake them for *knowledge*. Jacob had to learn and to feel after God by the experience of His goodness, and not merely to satisfy himself with a name. Words would only have limited and circumscribed the Infinite. 4. *That God's revelation of Himself to us is intended to change our character.* The name of Jacob was changed to that of Israel. He is no more *supplanter* (Jacob), but *prevailer with God* (Israel). He had now put off the old man, and put on the new man; and this change in his character is signified by a new name. He now walks in "newness of life." Twenty years before this, God had appeared to him and Heaven was opened to him in forgiveness and blessing. But all through and since this the essential principles of his character were not altered. There was still something subtle in him, deep cunning and craft,—a lack of reality. Jacob was tender and devout after his manner; but he was still the subtle supplanter, and only half honest. But now that he is overcome by the awful God, his subtlety departs from him. He becomes real and true. When God lays hold upon us, it is for the purpose of removing us from the old life to the new. 4. *That God is conquered by prayer and supplication.* "When He saw that He prevailed not against him." (Verse 25.) Here is the strange spectacle of Omnipotence unable to vanquish "the worm, Jacob." But the strength by which Jacob wrestled was not the strength of bone and muscle, and the angel's inability was nothing but the inability to withstand the power of faith in His own promises. The strength by which he prevailed was God's own strength. Every true Israelite pleads the promises of God with an importunity that will take no denial, and God is pleased to suffer Himself to be thus overcome. God's contest with us is friendly.

THE FEATURES OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF REVEALED FAITH IN JACOB'S WRESTLING.

1. *The germ of the incarnation.* Godhead and humanity wrestling with each other; the Godhead in the form of a man. 2. *The germ of the atonement.* Sacrifice of the human will. 3. *The germ of justification by faith.* "I will not let thee go," etc. 4. *The germ of the new-birth.* Jacob, Israel. 5. *The germ of the principle of love to one's enemies.* The reconciliation with God, reconciliation with the world.—(*Lange*).

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 24. This strife was not only corporeal but spiritual; as well by the force of his faith as strength of body. "He prevailed" by prayers and tears. (Hos. xii. 4.) Our Saviour also prayed Himself into "an agony," (Luke xxii. 44.) and we are bidden to "strive in prayer," even to an agony, (Rom. xv. 30.) Every sound is not music; so neither is every uttering petitions to God a prayer. It is not the labour of the lips, but the travail of the heart. A man must wrestle with God, and wring the blessing out of His hands, as the woman of Canaan did. He must "stir up himself to take hold of God." (Isa. lxiv. 7.)—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 25. But what a wonder is this? Jacob received not so much hurt from all his enemies as from his best friend. Not one of his hairs perished by Laban or Esau, yet he lost a joint by the angel, and was sent halting to his grave. He that knows our strength, yet will wrestle with us for our exercise, and loves our violence and importunity.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

This was the turning point in Jacob's life. Henceforth he will put less dependence on the flesh, and fleshly means, and more upon God his deliverer. He prevailed, indeed, but bore about in his body the marks of the struggle, and succeeded only by prayer and faith. The thigh is the pillar of a man's strength, and the hip-joint is the seat of physical force for him who would stand his ground as a wrestler.—(*Jacobus.*)

In all the gains of godliness there is yet something inflicted to keep us humble.

Verse 26. Jacob conquers at the moment his physical strength is crippled. (2 Cor. xii. 10.) The All-powerful cannot go without Jacob's leave. And Jacob will not let Him go except He bless him. What loving condescension of the covenant God, binding Himself to the sinner! "I will not leave thee. nor forsake thee." (Heb. xiii. 5.) "Concerning the work of my hands command ye me." What power of faith to hold on, and not to let go the Covenant Angel without a blessing!—(*Jacobus.*)

This teaches us as our Saviour did, by the parable of the importunate widow (Luke xviii. 1), to persevere in prayer, and to devour all discouragements. Jacob holds with his hands, when his joints were out of joint. The woman of Canaan will not be put off, either with silence or sad answers.—(*Trapp.*)

The highest heroism of faith shines forth in these words. Doubtless the power of Jacob's antagonist was sufficient to have freed himself from this death-like embrace. But His omnipotence was limited in its operation by his promise to his servant "to do him good." Nor did He really desire that Jacob should free him from the obligation to do him good. He rather aimed to have the pleasure of seeing how firm, by His grace, are the hearts of His children, even when many waters of affliction go over them, and how the seed of God remains in them. God Himself is the author of this constancy, and hence it is that it is so pleasing in His sight; for He takes pleasure in all His works.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 27. The mention of his name not only reminded him of his predicted ascendancy over Esau, but also of all the rich blessings and prerogatives of the covenant established with his fathers. And what could more tend to cheer and encourage him on this occasion than such refreshing recollections? Yet the ensuing words disclose a still deeper drift in the question.

Verse 28. The new name is indicative of the new nature which has now come to its perfection of development in Jacob. Unlike Abraham, who received his new name once for all, and was never afterwards called by the former one, Jacob will hence be called now by the one, and now by the other, as the occasion may serve. For he was called from the womb. (Gen. xxv. 23), and both names have a spiritual significance for two different aspects of the child of God, according to the apostles' paradox, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." (Phil. ii. 12, 13.)—(*Murphy*).

Proper names in scripture are frequently used to designate the character rather than the common appellation of those to whom they are applied. Thus it was predicted of Christ that "His name should be called Wonderful, Immanuel," etc. (Isa. ix. 6; vii. 14), the meaning of which is, that His *nature* should *be* wonderful, should be Immanuel, etc. So our Lord says to His disciples, "I have called you friends" (John xv. 15), *i.e.*, I declare you to *be* friends. Jacob should now be declared to be possessed of a new character by the significant designation assigned him. In allusion to his "power with God," the Most High says by His prophet, "I said not to the *seed of Jacob*, seek ye me in vain." (Isa. xlv. 19.) The *seed of Jacob* is specified rather than the seed of Abraham, from this eminent instance of Jacob's praying and prevailing in a season of extremity, and thus carrying an implication that his "seed" would inherit their father's spirit in this respect.—(*Bush.*)

No longer Jacob the supplanter, but Israel the Prince of God—the champion of the Lord, who had fought *with* God and conquered; and who, henceforth, will fight *for* God and be His true loyal soldier; a larger and more unselfish man—honest and true at last. No man becomes honest till he has got face to face with God. There is a certain insincerity about us all—a something dramatic. One of those dreadful moments which throw us upon ourselves, and strip off the hollowness of our outside show, must come before the insincere is true.—(*Robertson.*)

All God's Israel are wrestlers by calling. (Eph. vi. 12.) As "good soldiers of Jesus Christ," they must "suffer hardness." (2 Tim. ii. 3.) The Lord Christ stands over us as He did over Stephen (Acts vii. 53), with a crown upon His head and another in His hand, with this inscription, "To him that overcometh." (Rev. ii., iii.)—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 29. Names have a power, a strange power of hiding God. Speech has been bitterly defined as the art of hiding thought. That sarcastic definition has in it a truth. The Eternal word is the revealer of God's thought; and every *true* word of man is *originally* the expression of a thought; but by degrees the word hides the thought. Words often hide from us our ignorance of even earthly truth. The child asks for information, and we satiate his curiosity with words. Who does not know how we satisfy ourselves with the name of some strange bird or plant, or the name of some new law in nature? We get the name, and fancy we understand something more than we did before; but, in truth, we are more hopelessly ignorant. We fancy we possess it, because we have got the name by which it is known; and the word covers over the abyss of our ignorance. If Jacob had got a *word*, that word might have satisfied him. He would have said, now I understand God, and know all about Him. God's plan was not to give names and words, but truths of feeling. That night, in that strange scene, He impressed on Jacob's soul a religious awe, which was hereafter to develop,—not a set of formal expressions, which would have satisfied with husks the cravings of the intellect, and shut up the soul:—Jacob felt the Infinite, who is more truly felt when least named. Words would have reduced that to the Finite; for, oh! to know all about God is one thing—to know the living God is another.—(*Robertson*).

Verse 30. Bethel, Mahanaim, Peniel, divine stations in the journey of the pilgrim of faith.—(*Lange*).)

To see God face to face and live is the marvel of human experience.—(*Jacobus*).

The Christian also has his memorable places: Bethlehem, Capernaum, Jerusalem, Calvary, and the Mount of Olives, are among them. Every Christian has his particular Peniel, in which God revealed himself to him in an especial manner—his closet, the sanctuary, a book, a sermon, a company, a solitary hour, which continue consecrated in his grateful memory.—(*Bush*).

His words are equivalent to the declaration, "I am preserved, and shall be preserved." Here, then, is the echo of faith, "Although new tribulations may befall me, according to the will of God, yet I shall be preserved, and He will at length deliver me from all evil. Of this I am assured, for I know in whom I have believed." His subsequent history shows that his confidence was well founded.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 31. Nature without was in harmony with the new feelings awakened within his soul. The Sun of Righteousness, the day-spring from on high, had risen upon him. He went lame, but he was blessed. While he rejoices in the exceeding mercy of God, he is at the same time, reminded of his own nothingness and humbled.

The wrenching of the tendons and muscles was mercifully healed, yet so as to leave a permanent monument in Jacob's halting gait, that God had overcome his self-will.—(*Murphy*).

Verse 32. This story contains three points which are specially interesting to every Jew in a national point of view. It explained to him why he was called an Israelite. It traces the origin of his own name to a distant ancestor, who had been a wrestler with God, from whence he had obtained the name Israel. It casts much deep and curious interest round an otherwise insignificant village, Peniel, where this transaction had taken place, and which derived its name from it—Peniel, the face of God. And, besides, it explained the origin of a singular custom, which might seem a superstitious one, of not suffering a particular muscle to be eaten, and regarding it with a kind of religious awe, as the part in which Jacob is said by tradition to have been injured, by the earnest tension of his frame during the struggle.—(*Robertson.*)

The preceding narrative teaches us, 1. That great trials often befall the people of God when in the way of commanded duty. 2. The surest way of prevailing with man is to prevail with God. 3. Prevailing at last will recompense all our striving.—(*Bush.*)

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Critical Notes.—3. **Bowed himself to the ground seven times.**] "He bowed himself after the Eastern fashion, bending the body so that the face nearly touches the ground. The text gives us to understand that these obeisances were not made on the same spot, but one after another as he approached Esau." (*Alford.*)—5. **Who are those with thee?**] Heb. *Who these to thee?*—pertaining to thee.—11. **My blessing.**] Meaning my gratuity. In Scripture a *gift* is often called a *blessing* (1 Sam. xxv. 27; xxx. 26; 2 Kings v. 15). **I have enough.** "*The expression* is rendered in our version in the same way with that of Esau (verse 9), but they differ in the original. Esau says (*Heb.*), 'I have much,' but Jacob (Heb.), 'I have all.'"—14. **According as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure.**] *Heb.* "According to the foot of the possessions—and according to the foot of the children." The meaning is, at the *pace* of the cattle, as fast as the business of travelling with cattle will permit. 15. **Let me now leave with thee some of the folk that are with me.**] Heb. "I will place, station, set." He wished to leave part of his men as an escort or guard to Jacob's company. 17. **Made booths for his cattle.**] "*Booths*, or folds, composed of upright stakes wattled together, and sheltered with leafy branches." (*Murphy.*)—18. **Shalem, a city of Shechem.**] "It seems very improbable that the word Shalem should be a proper name, as the A.V. after the LXX. and Vulgate has rendered it. No such place is known in the neighbourhood of Sichem (Nablus), nor mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. The meaning is far more probably 'in peace.'" (*Alford.*)—19. **An hundred pieces of money.**] This coin is called *kesitah* (lamb). *Gesenius* suggests that this was probably of the value of a lamb. Ancient coins were often stamped with the image of an animal, which they represented. 20. **Called it El-Elohe-Israel.**] That is God, the God of Israel.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–16.

The Reconciliation of Jacob and Esau.

I. It illustrates the difference between the characters of the two brothers. 1. *Esau was generous and forgiving.* He was generous in refusing Jacob's present (Verse 9), and also in afterwards consenting to accept it (Verse 11); because to decline a gift is a token of enmity among the Orientals. There must be some one to receive in order that others may have the blessedness of giving. He was generous also in offering an escort, and in that delicate feeling which led him not to press it upon his brother (Verse 15). Esau was of a forgiving disposition. His passion soon cooled down, and there was a fund of good nature within him. 2. *In Jacob there are traces of his old subtlety.* His old life had left traces in his character of fear, distrust, and suspicion. He was a cool, calculating man, one who refused to commit himself to others, however encouraging the appearances. He did not ally himself too closely with Esau's band, lest the old enmity should break out. He would put off the more leisurely meeting with his brother till afterwards, proposing to pay an early visit to him at his residence. (Verse 14.) We have no account of their meeting afterwards, until they met at their father's funeral. (Ch. xxxv. 29.) Jacob simply desires his brother's favour, and does not care to be too closely associated with him.

II. It illustrates the power of human forgiveness—One forgave, and the other received forgiveness. There is a forgiveness of man by man which is virtually God's forgiveness. This grace at the hands of Esau was to Jacob as "the face of God" (Verse 10). Therefore he comes in peace to the city (Verse 18). He had sought forgiveness in the right way, by humility, by a sense of his sin. And he obtained it most fully (Verse 4).

III. It illustrates the tyranny of old sins.—The brothers separated, but not to meet again for many years. It would not have been expedient for them to live together. All was forgiven, but there was no longer any confidence. So the effects of past sins remain.

IV. It illustrates the power of Godliness.—This is not an ordinary reconciliation of human enmities. It has a deep foundation, for it is based upon the reconciliation of Jacob with God. Jacob might have tried to overcome wrath with wrath. He once had hoped to overcome Esau by force, but now he tries the new and better way. Jacob's humility before his brother was but a sign of his humility before God. His satisfaction to Esau is a sign also of his reconciliation with God. The strength of his love and confidence comes from God's grace. He could not mingle afterwards with Esau, for he had the consciousness within him of his high calling of God. Notwithstanding the many flaws in Jacob's character, he had that God-consciousness which was lacking in his brother.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Jacob masters his fears, and makes use of the likeliest means. So Esther, when she had prayed, resolved to venture to the king whatever came of it. And our Saviour, though before fearful, yet, after He had prayed in the garden, goes forth and meets His enemies in the face, asking them, "Whom seek ye?" (John xviii. 4). Great is the power of prayer to steel the heart against whatsoever amazements.—(*Trapp*).

Verses 2, 3. Esau has the array of physical force. Jacob has only a weak band of women and children. Yet Jacob prevails.—(*Jacobus*).

In the midst of all his fear Jacob displayed true courage. He placed himself at the front of the band. Like the Captain of our salvation, he was ready to bear the brunt of the battle.

Verse 4. Esau is blunt and generous. Jacob had the guilty conscience, and therefore he does not touch upon the brotherly relation.

In Esau's tenderness towards his brother we are reminded of the gracious reception of another penitent (Luke xv. 20).

The dreaded time with Jacob was turned to joy and gladness. God is better to him than all his fears.

Verse 5. Jacob's answer is worthy of Him. It savours of the fear of God which ruled in his heart, and taught him to acknowledge Him even in the ordinary concerns of life.—(*Fuller*).

Verses 6, 7. Had this been done to Jacob, methinks he would have answered, *God be gracious unto you, my children.* But we must take Esau as he is, and rejoice that things are as they are. We have often occasion to be thankful for civilities, when we can find nothing like religion.—(*Fuller*).

Verse 8. We are taught the propriety of conceding all that we can to others for the sake of making or preserving peace. The Christian's inheritance will leave him riches enough, and his prerogatives honour enough, after all the abatements that his generosity prompts him to make.—(*Bush*).

Verse 9. Whatever effect Jacob's present had upon him, he would not be thought to be influenced by anything of that kind; especially as he had great plenty of his own. Jacob, however, continued to urge it upon him, not as he thought he needed it, but as a token of good-will, and of his desire to be reconciled. He did not indeed make use of this term, nor of any other that might lead to the recollection of their former variance.—(*Fuller*).

Verse 10. The receiving of a present at another's hand is, perhaps, one of the greatest proofs of reconciliation. Everyone is conscious that he could not receive a present at the hand of an enemy. And upon this principle no offerings of sinful creatures can be accepted of God, till they are reconciled to Him by faith in the atonement of His Son.—(*Fuller*).

God Himself had appeared to Jacob as his combatant instead of Esau. Therefore Jacob sees in Esau the appearance of God again. And in this, case, as in that, the face, angry at first, changes into kindness to the believing man.—(*Baumgarten*).

Already he had met Esau in the conflict with God, and had received encouragement of success in this meeting; and now he recognises the significance of that wrestling which ends in blessing. Seeing Esau now is like seeing the face of God, and that which was already signified to him by the angel must not fail. Here again Jacob displays his triumphant faith.—(*Jacobus*).

In the forgiveness which comes from man we may see a reflection of God's forgiveness.

Verse 11. Esau had said, literally, *I have much.* Jacob says, "*I have all.*" The worlding may indeed have much; but he lacks one thing which is the vital thing—which is everything—as the soul to the body, as the eye to the needle, as the blade of the knife. The Christian has all things, the world, life, death, things present, things to come!—(*Jacobus*).

Jacob had all, because he had the God of all.—(*Trapp*).

Verses 12–15. Jacob was discreet in resolutely declining the offer of Esau. He would do better to pursue his journey alone. They might properly embrace for a few moments, but if they had attempted to sojourn together, the enmity so early planted between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent would in all likelihood have broken forth. Esau would once more have hated Jacob, or the spiritually man of God have been drawn from his allegiance by his more worldly-minded brother.—(*Bush*).

Many evils arise from lack of that kind of prudence which Jacob showed.

It is not expedient for believers to form close compacts with the children of this world.

Jacob, in declining the offered escort, had other reasons than compassion for his children and cattle. But he did not feel bound to state them, for this would have given offence and produced greater evils.

Jacob had sufficient experience of the past to teach him to trust himself entirely to the guardianship of God.

Verse 16. *On his way unto Seir.* Whither God had sent him beforehand to plant out of Jacob's way. He was grown rich, desired liberty, and saw that his wives were offensive to the old couple; therefore he removed his dwelling to Mount Seir, and left better room for Jacob.—(*Trapp*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17–20.

JACOB'S FAITH AND PIETY.

I. His faith. He bought a parcel of ground as a pledge of his faith in the future possession of that country by his posterity (Verse 19). This purchase of a portion of land, concerning which God had promised Abraham that it should be his, showed Jacob's deep conviction that the promise was renewed to him and to his seed.

II. His piety. This was an evidence of his faith. He gave himself up entirely to God, and this inward feeling was expressed outwardly by acts of obedience and devotion. His piety is seen—1. *In an act of worship.* "He erected there an altar." This was in keeping with his vow (Gen. xxviii. 21). 2. *In the use of blessings already given.* He called the altar "El-elohe-Israel" (Verse 20). He now uses his own new name, Israel, for the first time, in association with the name of God. He uses that name which signifies the Mighty One, who was now his covenant God. He lives up to his privilege, uses all that God had given. He had vowed that he would take the Lord to be his God. 3. *In the peace he enjoyed.* He arrived in peace at his journey's end (Verse 18).—*(See Critical Notes.)*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 16, 17. We view Jacob's settlement at Succoth—1. In the light of a building of booths and houses for refreshment, after a twenty years' servitude, and the toils and soul-conflicts connected with his journeyings. 2. As a station where he might regain his health, so that he could come to Shechem well and in peace. 3. As a station where he could tarry for a time on account of Esau's importunity. (*Lange.*)

Verses 18, 19. The acquisition of a parcel of land at Shechem by Jacob, forms a counterpart to the purchase of Abraham at Hebron. But there is an evident progress here, since he made the purchase for his own settlement during life, while Abraham barely gained a burial place. In Jacob's life, too, the desire to exchange the wandering nomadic life for a more fixed abode becomes more apparent than in the life of Isaac.—(*Lange.*)

Verse 20. Jacob consecrates his ground by the erection of an altar. He calls it the altar of the Mighty One, the God of Israel, in which he signalises the omnipotence of Him who had brought him safely to the land of promise through many perils, the new name by which he himself had been lately designated, and the blessed communion which now existed between the Almighty and himself. This was the very spot where Abraham, about 185 years ago, built the first altar he erected in the promised land (Gen. xii. 6, 7). It is now consecrated anew to the God of promise.—(*Murphy.*)

He erected an altar—1. As a memorial of the promises, and a symbol of God's presence. 2. As an external profession of his piety. 3. That he might set up God in his family, and season all his worldly affairs with a relish of religion.—(*Trapp.*)

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Critical Notes.—1. **To see the daughters of the land.**] To make their acquaintance—to pay them a friendly visit. 3. **He loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel**] Heb. "He loved the damsel and spake to her heart." The idea seems to be conveyed that he endeavoured to comfort her by promising marriage and fidelity. 6. **Hamor, the father of Shechem, went out unto Jacob to commune with him.**] In Oriental countries the fathers arrange the marriages of their children. 7. **Wrought folly in Israel.**] "This was a standing phrase from this time forth for crimes against the honour and vocation of Israel as the covenant people, especially for gross sins of the flesh." (Deut. xxii. 21; Judges xx. 10; 2 Sam. xiii. 2.) "Fool" and "folly" are terms used of impiety and iniquity." (See Proverbs.) (*Jacobus*). "The expression manifestly belongs to a later time, and betrays the hand of a subsequent editor. It could hardly have been found in any document dating previously to the constitution of a community known by the name of Israel." (*Alford.*) 12. **Dowry and gift.**] Dowry to the bride, gifts to her family. 26. **With the edge of the sword.**] Heb. "By the mouth of the sword." Whence the sword is said to "devour."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-5.

Dinah's Dishonour.

Illustrates the following truths—

I. **That there is great danger in a vain curiosity of seeing the world.** Dinah was curious to know the ways and customs of the surrounding people. This led to a careless intimacy, which ended in accomplishing her ruin. She ought not to have wandered beyond parental control and supervision, nor disregarded the duty of separation from an idolatrous people, and their manners and habits. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." The inhabitants of that country were to the family of Jacob what the present world is to the Christian. It is dangerous to the interests of the soul to indulge in the vain curiosity of knowing the evil ways of the world. What is called "seeing life" may prove, in many cases, to be but tasting death. Familiarity blunts the sense of things sinful, and increases the danger of temptation.

II. **That some sentiment of virtue may remain in those addicted to the worst social vices.** Shechem, we are told, "loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel." He was willing to make honourable amends, as far as could be, by an offer of marriage. In this he was generous and noble, for lust commonly ends in loathing. Ammon abhors Thamar as before he loved her. But this man desires to cover his fault by marriage, and promises love and fidelity. He had many of the vices of the great and powerful, but was not without some remains of virtue. The conduct of this heathen man is a rebuke to many who dwell in Christian lands.

III. That increasing troubles may fall to the lot of good men. Jacob now suffered one of the most dreadful calamities that can fall upon a household—the disgrace and ruin of his daughter. When he heard of it, he "held his peace," as if stunned by the blow. (Verse 5). He was a man greatly favoured of God. He had seen the open vision of heaven. God had promised to be his God, and to be with him to the end of his days. He had made and performed his vows. He had erected his altar. Here was a man raised in spiritual priviliges above all men, and yet the gathering clouds of adversity surround him, and grow more dark and gloomy towards the close of his life. He had been delivered from foreign troubles, and now domestic troubles fall upon him. The honour of his family was laid in the dust. All sorts of complications of distress fell to the lot of this good man. As a son, servant, husband, father; in youth, manhood, and in old age, he is afflicted beyond the lot of most men When one difficulty is surmounted, another, and a greater one, arises. No wonder the poor old man sums up his life, at the end, by saying, "All these things are against me."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1, 2. As her mother Leah, so she hath a fault in her eyes, which was curiosity. She will needs see, and be seen; and whilst she doth vainly see, she is seen lustfully. It is not enough for us to look to our own thoughts, except we beware of the provocations of others. If we once wander out of the lists that God hath set us in our callings, there is nothing but danger. Her eyes were guilty of the temptation; only to see is an insufficient warrant to draw us into places of spiritual hazard. If Shechem had seen her busy at home, his love had been free from outrage; now the lightness of her presence gave encouragement to his inordinate desires. Immodesty of behaviour makes way to lust, and gives life unto wicked hopes. —*(Bishop Hall.)*

By those windows of the eyes and ears sin and death often enter. See to the cinque ports if ye would keep out the enemy. Shut up the five windows if ye would have the house, the heart, full of light, saith the Arabian proverb.—*(Trapp.)*

It seemed an innocent action to go out of mere curiosity, to see the daughters of the land. But in relation to morals there are scarcely any actions that are trifling and insignificant.

Vers. 3, 4.—And now he goes about to entertain her with honest love, whom the rage of his lust had dishonestly abused. He will hide her dishonour with the name of an husband. Those actions which are ill begun can hardly be salved up with late satisfactions; whereas good entrances give strength unto the proceedings, and succcess to the end.—*(Bp. Hall.)*

The sequel shows that nothing could retrieve the mischief of the first false step. A willingness to make amends for sin will not avert its legitimate consequences.—*(Bush.)*

Verse 5. It is not meant that he was entirely silent, saying nothing about it in his family, which would have been inconceivable under the circumstances; but that he took no measures in respect to it, he forbore all action. He did not foresee the issue, or he would probably have taken the affairs into his own hands, and acted upon it at once. As it was, however, he did better in thus "ruling his spirit," than did his sons who took the city. (Prov. xvi. 32.)—*(Bush.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6–31.

THE PUNISHMENT OF DINAH'S DISHONOUR.

I. It was prompted by a feeling of vengeance against the doer of a gross moral wrong. The sons of Jacob were not satisfied with the offer of Shechem to repair the evil, to redeem the wrongs he had brought upon their house. They considered it so grievous as to be beyond repair. "He had wrought folly in Israel, in lying with Jacob's daughter." (Verse 17.) They regarded his act as a sin against the chosen of God—against the Church. A stricter morality, and a stronger sense of the evil of sin, enters with this name of Israel. All who were called by that name lived in a different moral atmosphere from the surrounding nations. The sons of Jacob looked upon the deed in itself as not to be wiped away by any amendments of the future. It was wrong, and must be visited for its own sake as well as for its consequences. It "ought not to be done." (Verse 17.)

II. It was a grievous sin. 1. *It was unjust and cruel.* The punishment was far in excess of the fault, and the innocent were made to suffer with the guilty. In the moral government of God men do suffer for the sins of others, but to inflict those sufferings ourselves, of set purpose, is a sin against justice. It was cruel to take advantage of men whom they had first rendered helpless. (Verse 25.) 2. *It was committed under the hypocritical pretence of religion.* (Verses 15–18). Here was hypocrisy in hiding this crafty cruelty under the name of religion. A sacrament is prostrated to the vilest purposes—used for murder. This conduct has all the characteristics of religious fanaticism; which clings to religion, not as a healthy, but as a monstrous and diseased growth. It was a right feeling which led the sons of Jacob to defend the purity and honour of their family, but it was wrong to secure even this high purpose by the prostitution of the offices of religion. 3. *It was perilous to the true interests of the kingdom of God.* "Ye have troubled me," said Jacob, to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land," etc. (Verse 30.) Jacob was the Israel of God, and he felt that his sons by this foul deed had made him offensive to the heathen. They had endangered the existence of the Church. And such are always the results of fanaticism. They throw discredit upon Christianity. Abraham and Isaac had been peaceable in their days, and had won the respect of the surrounding heathen. Jacob now felt as if the ancient renown of his house were laid in the dust.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 6, 7. Their resentment was faulty in assuming the character of a bloody vindictiveness. It was proper that they should be *grieved*, it was not unnatural that they should be *wroth*; and it was much to their honour that they were disposed to brand the violator of chastity with infamy. But was it for the sin committed against God, or only for the shame visited upon the family, that they were engaged? Here, alas, they failed.—(Gen. xlix. 7.—(*Bush*).

Unruly youths put their aged pa

rents, many times, to much travail and trouble; as Samson, Shechem, etc. Green wood is ever shrinking and warping; whereas the well-seasoned holds a constant firmness.—(*Trapp*).

Verses 8–12.—Many fine things were said, both by the father as a politician, in favour of intermarriages between the families in general, and by the son as a lover, in order to gain the damsel. —(*Fuller*).

Their uninstructed minds could not enter into the reasons of such an exclusive policy in this respect as the Israelites felt constrained to adopt. In the true spirit of an unbelieving world they endeavoured to break down what they would deem the narrow spirit of caste, by holding out to them those inducements of gainful traffic which they are sensible they could not themselves withstand in similar circumstances, and which, alas, are usually but too potent in overcoming the scruples of the professed people of God.—(*Bush*).

Verses 13–17. The execution of this project was marked—1. By the vilest hypocrisy. They pretended to have scruples of conscience about connecting themselves with persons who were uncircumcised. 2. By the grossest profaneness. They knew that if the Shechemites were persuaded to submit to circumcision it would be a mere form, leaving them as to their relation to God just where they were before. They propose that the males should receive the seal of God's holy covenant, not in order to obtain any spiritual benefit, but solely with a view to carnal gratification. 3. It was conceived in the spirit of the most savage cruelty. What amazing depravity does it argue, first to form such a horrid purpose, and then to cover it with the cloak of religion.—(*Bush*).

In Oriental countries it is held that the brothers are more deeply disgraced by the seduction of their sister than the husband is by the fall of his wife; for the wife can be divorced but not the sister.—(*Jacobus*).

Verses 18, 19. This high character is given to him, perhaps referring only to his social standing. But he was a heathen, and the covenant family of Jacob must have known that no mere outward ceremonial act could incorporate them with the chosen family so as to make them sharers in the future glory of Israel. Nor could the sacrament itself make this wrong-doer a true Israelite. He took a mere worldly view of the matter, and was willing to take the sacrament for gain.—(*Jacobus*).

Verses 20–23. These great men easily persuaded and prevailed with the people to have what they would. When Crispus believed, who was the chief ruler of the synagogue, many Corinthians believed also. (Acts xviii. 8.) Paul was loath to lose the deputy, because his conversion would draw on many others. As, on the contrary, Jereboam caused Israel to sin; and generally, as the kings were good or evil, so were the people.—(*Trapp.*)

No little art is discoverable in the arguments employed. The principal prominence is given to those considerations which were merely secondary, while the main point, the circumcision, comes in as a little by-clause, a slight condition, to which they could not reasonably object. This was approaching worldly men through the most effectual avenue. Appeals to their interest usually succeed where their principles are addressed in vain.—(*Bush.*)

It is the worldly policy of rulers to pretend the public good.

Profit persuades mightily with the multitude. They all look to their own way. (Isa. lvi. 11.)—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 24. Many have lost their blood, and suffered much trouble for their lusts, as, had it been for religion, they had been martyrs. But the cause, and not the punishment, makes the martyr.—(*Trapp.*)

Nations do not readily change their gods. (Jer. ii. 10, 11.) The ready submission of this people to the rites of a new religion is one of the most singular facts of all history.

Verses 25–29. We have here a fresh proof of the veracity of Moses. Himself a Levite, he does not spare the character of his progenitor. In all the simplicity of truth he gives an unvarnished statement of atrocities which have reflected everlasting disgrace upon the memory of the founder of his line. Would an imposter have done this?—(*Bush.*)

One sin leads on to another, and, like flames of fire, spreads desolation on every side. Dissipation leads to seduction; seduction produces wrath; wrath thirsts for revenge; the thirst for revenge has recourse to treachery; treachery issues in murder; and murder is followed by lawless depredation.—*(Bush).*

This history, like that of David and others, shows that sins against social purity tend, more than any other, to produce all the evils of hatred, revenge, and murder.

Verse 30. He does not now make mention of their crime against God, but only of the immediate consequences to him and to his house. He mentions this peril to arouse the compunction of his sons. They might care for this common danger, if not for their sin.—*(Jacobus).*

Ver. 31. Instead of regretting that they had acted so treacherous and cruel a part, they vindicate themselves without hesitation, and even tacitly condemn their father as manifesting less concern for his daughter than they had shown for their sister. Daily experience shows us that when once the conscience is seared, there is no iniquity too gross to be palliated or justified.—*(Bush.)*

CHAPTER XXXV.

Critical Notes.—**2. The strange gods.]** These were such as the *teraphim* that Rachel had hidden (Gen. xxxi. 19), and possibly other idolatrous images used by the Shechemites.—**4. Ear-rings.]** "The ear-rings were connected then, as they are now, with incantations and enchantments, and were idolatrous in their use. (Hos. ii. 13.) (*Jacobus.*) *The oak which was by Shechem.* "In the repetition of this same act of purification by Joshua (Josh. xxiv. 26) mention is again made of an oak (or terebinth) at Shechem. The Hebraists tell us that we must not understand by this term any particular tree, but one tree among many." (*Alford.*)—**7. El-beth-el.]** God of Bethel. "Jacob adds to it here the name of God, repeated as indicating a repeated manifestation. (Gen. xxxii. 30)." (*Jacobus.*) *God appeared unto him.* Heb. *There God was revealed unto him.* It is not the same word as *appeared* in ver. 1. The verb is plural, probably to indicate that it was the vision of God accompanied by the holy angels.—**8. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse.]** This nurse had accompanied her from Mesopotamia to Canaan. (Gen. xxiv. 59.) She was such a nurse as performed the functions of a mother in giving suck. *Allon-bachuth.* "*The oak of weeping.*"—**18. Ben-oni.]** Heb. *Son of my pain.* *Benjamin.* Heb. *Son of right hand*, or, *son of happiness.*—**20. The pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day.]** The grave of Rachel was well known in the time of Samuel. (1 Sam. x. 2.) The expression "unto this day" occurs often in Genesis, but not elsewhere in the Pentateuch, excepting once in Deuteronomy.—**21. Tower of Edar.]** Probably a watch-tower for the purpose of guarding the flocks. (2 Kings xviii. 8; 2 Chron. xxvi. 10; xxvii. 4.)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-15.

Jacob's Second Journey to Bethel.

I. It was undertaken at the call of God. God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel." (Verse 1.) We need not suppose that he heard the voice of God outwardly speaking to his ear of flesh, but rather that inward voice of God which speaks to the conscience. A strong conviction had grown up within his soul which could no longer leave him at rest. Jacob had now tarried at Shechem for eight years, and he had not yet performed the vow which he made at Bethel. The sense of a solemn duty rests upon him, growing stronger until it really becomes to him the voice of God urging him to action.

II. It was accomplished in the spirit of obedience and consecration. 1. *Obedience.* Jacob and his people went up to Bethel at God's command. In order that he might preserve the purity of God's worship, he puts away from his company all the remains of idolatry. (Verse 4.) By getting rid of these possible sources of temptation, he would be able to render to God a pure offering of service and worship. He intended that the performance of his duty should be extensive and complete. 2. *Consecration.* He erected an altar unto God, as he had been commanded. (Verses 1–7.) And here he consecrated himself afresh to the service of his God. These outward aids to devotion would make God more deeply felt, and His presence more definitely realised. If we form part of a spiritual history of close and intimate dealings with God, we must have our sacred places. They are so to us, and for our sakes alone; for God, who fills all space, does not require such aids. Jacob erects a pillar of memorial, pours an offering upon the stone, and anoints it with oil. (Verse 14.) And God, who is essentially present everywhere at the same moment, met Jacob at Bethel. Thus to His saints God is not a cold abstraction, or a vaguely diffused Spirit of the universe, but a living—a felt Presence.

III. It was accompanied by the Divine protection. God who commanded Jacob also protected him on his journey. The people were kept from pursuing after the sons of Jacob, which they naturally would have done in order to avenge the slaughter of the Shechemites. (Verse 5.)

IV. It was followed by increased spiritual blessing. 1. *The old promises were renewed.* All what God had formerly said to him by way of promise was now consolidated and confirmed. (Verses 9–12.) Jacob's name had been changed to Israel, and now this honour is here renewed. (Verse 10.) This was to him an assurance that he should still go on to prevail. In order to confirm his faith, God's all-sufficiency to fulfil His promises is assured. "I am God Almighty." (Verse 11.) Jacob acknowledges this confirmation of his faith and hope by repeating his former acts of devotion. (Verses 14, 15.) God may appear unto us by the revival of old truths as well as by the revelation of new ones. We may glorify Him, not by absolutely new modes of obedience, but by doing our first works. We may make the old life, and the scenes and circumstances of it, altogether new by a fresh consecration. 2. *He has increased knowledge of God.* He now knows God as the Almighty (Verse 11)—like Abraham of old. (Gen. xvii. 1.) Thus our knowledge of God increases as we go on. It comes as the reward of long and faithful service. 3. *His religious character is purified and raised.* Jacob was a selfish man, and his religion, at first, partook too much of the spirit of barter. (Gen. xxix.) His language formerly was that of one who was ready to drive a bargain on advantageous terms; for though we may not press his words too far, yet surely there was a trace of this spirit in them. "If God will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, then shall God be my God." Now he is grateful that God has accomplished His word. He knows the truth of that word, and that God shall be his God. He was answered in the day of his distress, and God had been with him throughout all his journey. (Verse 3.) This is serving God, because it is true happiness to do so, a higher motive than that which he first started with, but not the highest of all. It falls short of that higher stage of godliness which leads the believer to say in all things "Thy will be done."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Take the phrase "and God said" literally, and then we must believe that God spake to Jacob but does not speak to us; then we must look upon Him as a different God from what He was to Jacob; but no, He is the same. God is not extinct, but a living God; His voice is now no more silent than in Jacob's time. If He seem silent, the fault lies in us, our ears are become dull of hearing, we want faith.—(*Robertson.*)

This is not the first time that God tells him of that vow, and calls for its performance. (Gen. xxxi. 13.) It is with us as with children—eaten bread is soon forgotten. Deliverances, commonly, are but nine days' wonderment at most; and it is ten to one that any leper returns to give praise to God. If anything arouse and raise up our hearts to thankful remembrance of former mercy it must be the sense of some present misery, as here.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 2. To Gideon began his reformation at his father's house. David also would walk wisely in the midst of his house; and this he calls "a perfect way," a sign of sincerity. (Ps. ci. 1.) —(*Trapp.*)

God's service must be entered upon with due preparation. This is one of the first principles of religious service, and is expressed in the idea of baptism which preaches to us, "Be clean and change your garments." The saints must wash their hands in innocency, and so compass God's altar. — (Ps. xxvi. 6.)

Verse 3. He had become so comfortably settled as to be careless about this vow, until charged with it solemnly by God Himself. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion." True reformation as an evidence of repentance is a preparatory to public consecration.—(*Jacobus*).

Verse 4. When going to perform his vow he puts away these idols. But wherein lay the evil? Not in the use of forms and symbols, for these were afterwards given to the Jews by God. Idolatry consists in this: The using of forms and images which give unnecessarily ideas of God; *unnecessarily* I say, for though all our notions are inadequate they ought not to be unnecessarily so. So Jacob buried the images under the oak. It was most wise. It was not sufficient to say: Let them not be worshipped, let the gold be kept merely for ornament. He knew human nature better; he knew that the same feelings would be suggested again wherever they were seen. And in our own day the things which have been the symbols of idolatry must be parted with. We may say that crucifixes and stone altars, and lighted candles are nothing in themselves; but if they give the idea of localizing God, or in any way degrade His pure worship, then they must at once be buried. Happy for England is it that she has resolved to throw away all such things.—(*Robertson*).

Verse 5. The kind care which God exercised on this occasion was no less contrary to the parent's fears than to the deserts of his ungodly children; and its being extended to them *for his sake*, must appal their proud spirits and repress the insolence with which they had lately treated him.—(*Fuller*).

Verses 6, 7. There are sacred places, not sacred for their own sake, but sacred to us. Where we have loved and lost, where we have gained new light and life, the church where our forefathers worshipped, the place where we first knew God—these are by instinct hallowed. Hence we are told that God met Jacob in Bethel, not that He came down from another place, for He is everywhere, but that Jacob experienced a feeling of awe, a feeling that God was then specially near to him.—(*Robertson*).

Verse 8. This notice of the death and burial of Deborah shows—1. That old and faithful servants were esteemed in the household of Jacob, as they were in Abraham's household. The venerable nurse, Deborah, may be regarded as the counterpart to the aged Eliezer. 2. That the bond between master and servant was one of affectionate attachment and sympathy, not of lucre or slavery. The one rendered faithful service, the other afforded generous sustenance and protection. Such relations were not degraded by the commercial spirit, but elevated by the nobler spirit of humanity. 3. The undying love of Jacob for his mother. The loving regard in which Jacob held Deborah is remarkable when we consider that she belonged not to his family, but to that of Isaac. It is probable that Jacob visited his father, and finding that his mother was dead, he took her faithful old nurse to his own home. We hear nothing of her since the time when she left Padan-aram with her young mistress. Jacob tenderly cherished all that belonged to his mother. He was one of those men who lived in the past, rather than in the future. 4. The sacredness of sorrow for the dead. Deborah was now about 180 years old, and had lived through three generations of the family. Now this last tender link, connecting the wandering son with his beloved and doating mother, was snapped asunder by death. This grave renewed the heavy griefs of past years, and we do not wonder that Jacob called the tree which marked this grave, Allon-bachuth, "*the oak of weeping.*"

Verses 9–12. At Bethel He renews the change of name, to indicate that the meetings here were of equal moment in Jacob's spiritual life with that at Penuel. It implies also that this life had been declining in the interval between Penuel and Bethel, and had now been revived by the call of God to go to Bethel, and by the interview. The renewal of the naming aptly expresses this renewal of spiritual life.—(*Murphy.*)

Abraham and Isaac had each only one son of promise. Now the time of increase is come. Jacob had already eleven sons and one daughter, and the number of sons was to be increased to twelve; and from this time the increase is rapid. Twenty-six years after this he goes down to Egypt with seventy souls, besides the wives of his married descendants, and two hundred and fifteen years after that he leaves Egypt with one million and eight hundred thousand, which was a *nation and a congregation of nations*, while "*kings*" were to come afterwards.—(*Jacobus.*)

Verses 13–15. Here for the first time we meet with the libation. Wine and oil are used to denote the quickening and sanctifying power of the Spirit of God.—(*Murphy.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 16–20.

THE DEATH OF RACHEL.

Consider it—

I. In its solemn and melancholy aspect. 1. *It was death upon a journey.* "And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath." (Verse 16.) In such cases, death is generally an unlooked for event. This sad circumstance deeply impressed Jacob, and many years afterwards he looks back to it with sorrowful remembrance. (Gen. xlviii. 7.) 2. *It was death in the time of travail.* This is always a melancholy circumstance when the mother sacrifices her own life in giving life to her child. 3. *It was death just when her old fond desire was accomplished.* When Joseph was born, she believed that God would add to her another son. Now the long expected gift is granted, but she expires in the very moment of victory. Consider it—

II. In its hopeful and prophetic aspect. 1. *It teaches the doctrine of victory through pain.* She enriches the family of Jacob with a son, thus completing their number to twelve. The midwife comforts her thereupon. But the dying mother gave to the boy the name of Ben-oni, *son of my pain.* Through pain and sorrow this victory was gained. This was not an utterance of despair, but a conviction that life had come out of death; victory out of pain, sorrow, and apparent failure. This is the spirit of the cross. Through pain and sorrow, and apparent failure, Christ has purchased victory for us. 2. *It teaches that death is not annihilation.* "As her soul was in departing, (for she died)." (Verse 18.) Death is here represented, not as the complete extinction of all thought and feeling, but as the separation of soul and body. It is not a sinking into nought, but only a change of state and place. 3. *It teaches us what is the characteristic mark of God's chosen people.* Israel of old had the portion of affliction, and thus became the type of the Messiah, whose peculiar and distinctive mark was, that He was "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." (Isa. liii. 3.) Rachel was the ancestress of the suffering children of Israel 4. *It teaches a lesson of encouragement to all mothers dying in similar circumstances.* This is the first instance, recorded in the Bible, of a mother dying in travail. How solemn was the original penalty. Gen. (iii. 16.) And yet in God's later Revelation that penalty becomes transfigured, and there is in it an element of hope and blessing. (1 Tim. ii. 15.)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 16. Bethel beheld him at the summit of worldly happiness; Bethlehem, the next town through which he passes, sees him in the depths of affliction. The incident recalls, with painful vividness, the passionate exclamation she had before uttered, "Give me children, or else I die." Her prayer was heard, but at the expense of her life. Alas! how often should we be ruined at our own request, if God were not more merciful to us than we are to ourselves.—(*Bush*).

Verse 17. The first midwife who appears in the region of sacred history is a worthy counterpart to the first nurse, Deborah. She shows the vocation of a midwife, to support the labouring with sympathy, to encourage her, and to strengthen her by the birth of a child, especially of a son, or the announcement of the beginning of the new life.—(*Lange*).

Verse 18. Her words appear to have had no influence upon Rachel, who has the sentence of death in herself, and makes no answer; but, turning her dying eyes towards the child, and calling him, *Ben-oni*, "Son of my sorrow," she expires.—(*Bush*).

The former name, though very appropriate at the time, yet if continued, must tend perpetually to revive the recollection of the death of his mother, and of such a monitor Jacob did not stand in need. It is not for him to feed melancholy, nor to pore over his loss with a sullenness that shall unfit him for duty, but rather to divert his affections from the object that is taken, and direct them to those that are left. —(*Fuller*).

It is true, indeed, even in the sense of the usually received antithesis, that every newborn child is a Ben-oni, and a Benjamin; Ben-oni in Adam, Benjamin in Christ.—(*Lange*).

Let men make their burdens as light as they can, and not increase their worldly sorrow by sight of sad objects. It will come, as we say of foul weather, soon enough; we need not send for it.—(*Trapp*).

As her soul was in departing. As

ordinary historian would have said, as she was dying, or as she was ready to expire. But the Scriptures delight in an impressive kind of phraseology, which at the same time shall both instruct the mind and touch the heart. —(*Fuller.*)

Verse 19. Bethlehem here enters, clouded by Jacob's mourning; afterwards enlightened by David, the Old Testament hero out of Judah, and finally glorified by the fulfilment of Israel's hope.—(*Lange.*)

Verse 20. *The pillar of Rachel's grave.* Jacob loves the monumental stone.—(*Murphy*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 21-26.

JACOB'S TWELVE SONS.

The number, twelve, of the sons of Jacob, *in its typical significance.* Twelve, the number of a life completed, or expanded to its full limits and development, Thus in the house of Ishmael and of Esau, but in a higher sense in the house of Israel. Hence the twelve sons are the types of the twelve tribes (Gen. xlix; Deut. xxxiii), and the twelve tribes of the theocracy types of the twelve apostles of Christ, and these, again, types of the twelve fundamental forms of the New Testament Church. (Rev. xxi. 12, etc.—(*Lange*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 27-29.

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF ISAAC.

Isaac was "an hundred and fourscore years" when he died. He must, therefore, have lived in a state of blindness and inactivity for fifty-seven years. His life was greatly prolonged beyond the time when he could be, in any full sense, useful to his fellow men. But when that life reached its close the solemn lessons of it would come home to the survivors.

I. It was the occasion of family re-union. The quarrel between Jacob and Esau had ended in a reconciliation. (Gen. xxxiii.) Again they meet in peace for the burial of their father. It was in similar circumstances that Isaac himself and Ishmael had met many years before to bury their father, Abraham. The grave ought to silence all enmities. These two brothers met after many years of separation, each pursuing a different course of life. The marks of time are upon each of them—the impressions of long labours, cares and sorrows. Esau is still the man of the field, renowned in chase and war. Jacob is still devoted to peaceful and domestic pursuits, acquiring wealth slowly by the raising of cattle. He is now chastened and subdued by many a sorrow, his soul humbled by the open visions of God. And now, in the death of his beloved Rachel, the sin of Reuben, and the cruel wrath of Simeon and Levi, his cup of sorrow is full. We have here types of the afflictions, struggles, and enmities of the world; but we have also types of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace, and the great consolations of God.

II. It was at the time of revival for memories of the past. The two brothers, as they stood by his grave, would re-live their old life. Esau would naturally think of the fortresses he had built, of his wives and children—those who had been a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah, and of her whom he married to please and reconcile them, Bashemath the daughter of Ishmael.

Jacob would think upon the birthright, upon the promises of God renewed to him at Bethel, and now fulfilled in some degree at the death of his father. He would think of blessings yet to come when the glory and greatness of his posterity should increase, and they should have dominion and kingly power. The death of friends forces us to review our associated histories.

III. It was the beginning of another and a higher life. We are told that Isaac "was gathered unto his people." This surely signifies more than that he was joined to them in the grave. The expression suggests—1. *The idea of rest.* The toils and labours of human life end with the grave. Man goeth forth to his labour and to his work until the evening, and then the night of death comes when he can no longer work. The great end for which Isaac lived had now been gained. He had seen his two sons reconciled. He had been at length brought to the belief, though sore against his will, that the blessing of Abraham would descend along the line of Jacob. He had submitted to God. And having attained to this firm belief and resignation, the great work of his life was ended. Rest is welcome when the powers of life are failing and the work of life is done. 2. *The idea of re-union in another world.* We are told of Abraham that "he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God;" and further, that "Isaac and Jacob" were "heirs with Him of the same promise." (Heb. xi. 9, 10.) Surely Isaac died with the thought of meeting the beloved ones who had gone before, in a better country.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 27–29. Three special friends Jacob buries, in this chapter. Crosses come thick; be patient.—(*Trapp*).

We have no clue to his thoughts but the hopes and aspirations of that common nature which are called forth by trials and circumstances, which we have still in common with those who have gone before us in the generations. But this is a clue which we may surely follow, if we let it lead us onward from a more faithful and earnest discharge of our daily duties, especially of filial and paternal duty, to the day when whatsoever good thing any man doth the same shall he receive of the Lord; when the son who honoured his father and mother, either by paying them all deference and respect, or by supporting them in poverty, or by upholding them in their infirmity, or by paying the last tribute of affection and respect to their remains, shall so also himself receive of the Lord.—(*Robertson*).

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Critical Notes.—1. **Edom.**] This is a surname added to his birth-name, Esau. It is the national designation of his descendants.—2. **His wives.**] There is considerable difficulty about the names of Esau's wives. Comparing this account with the previous one in chaps. xxvi. 34, xxviii. 9, we find that two of the three names are entirely different. According to chap. xxv., Bashemath is daughter of Elon, the Hittite; according to this account she is daughter of Ishmael. The only honest conclusion must be with Kalisch, "we are obliged to confess that the Hebrew text, though containing several important coincidences, evidently embodies two accounts, irreconcileably different. And even thus we shall still require the hypothesis that subsequent changes have further confused the two accounts." (*Alford.*)—4. **Eliphaz.**] His son's name was Teman. (Verse 11.) Eliphaz, the Temanite, one of Job's friends, may have been a descendant of this son of Adah.—15. **Dukes.**] The Heb. word is *alluph*, from the same root as the first or *leading* letter of the Heb. alphabet. It properly signifies a chief, or leader.

The *alluphim* were the tribe-prince, or sheikhs.—24. The mules.] "The translation *mules* in the A.V. (*giants* in the Samaritan Pentateuch and in Onkelos) seems to be abandoned, and *warm springs* supposed to be the right one. These might be the warm springs in the Wadyel sal, S. of the Dead Sea, or perhaps those yet hotter springs in the *Wady Hamad*." (*Alford*) 31. Before there reigned any king over the children of Israel.] "This does not imply that Israel had a king when this history was written, which is not so, but that there was a promise kings to come out of the loins of Israel (Gen. xxxv. 11.; Comp. Gen. xvii. 16), and Israel had not yet enjoyed the kingly rule." Others think that this clause is a later insertion.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–43.

THE HISTORY OF THE GENERATIONS OF ESAU.

We have here a detailed account of the posterity of Esau. And we may learn from it the following lessons and truths:—

I. We see how the promises of God concerning Esau were fulfilled. He was promised great temporal prosperity; and that he should be the founder of a nation (Gen. xxv. 23; xxvii. 39, 40.) The chief design of the chapter is to show how completely these promises were fulfilled.

II. We learn what is the principle upon which Old Testament History is written. This chapter is a kind of leave-taking of Esau and his posterity. They appear as surrounded with a momentary glare of earthly glory, but they immediately fall out of the course of that history which is not a world-history, but a history of the kingdom of God. We hear no more of Esau's descendants after this, except when they cross the path of Israel's history, or appear on the page of prophecy as of bad eminence among the kingdoms of this world which are opposed to the kingdom of God. The way is cleared for the sacred annals of the chosen family by concluding and dismissing contemporaneous family histories. This is essentially the method and principle of this book of Genesis. Thus, we read of Abraham and his two sons; then the history takes up Isaac, and gradually becomes silent concerning Ishmael. Again, the history of Jacob advances, while that of Esau ceases. In Jacob's family, also, Joseph is the one chosen out of all his sons; the rest are scarcely mentioned. Thus God separates and divides His church from the world. The stream of sacred history leads on to the Messiah, the flower and perfection of our human race. Scripture history is written upon this principle—that it was God's design throughout to bring His only begotten Son into the world, and, therefore, that family alone in which He is to appear shall have a prominent record.

III. We learn that the enemies of God may be distinguished by great worldly glory and prosperity. Three times in this chapter we meet with the phrase, "This is Edom;" and once "He is Esau, the father of the Edomites." (Verses 1, 9, 19, 43.) They were the bitterest enemies of Israel. Esau is the father of persecutors. Yet Esau was prospered in his lifetime more than his brother. He was established with great power and dominion in Mount Seir, while his brother was a lowly servant at Padan-aram. And while the descendants of one were groaning under Egyptian oppression, those of the other were formed into an independent kingdom, and had eight kings in succession "before there reigned any king over the children of Israel." (Verse 31.) Thus the good things of this world may spring up rapidly, as with a vehement and plentiful growth and fruition, while the good things of the kingdom of God have to be waited for in faith and patience. Thus the believer is taught that he must toil slowly upwards, and must not envy the rapid and joyful prosperity of the children of this world. His record and his reward are with the Most High. His prosperity may be late and remote, but it is permanent.

IV. We learn how God works in the formation of peoples and nations. The subjugation of the Horites by the Edomites, and the fusion of both under one kingdom, is an instance of the manner in which peoples and nations are formed and consolidated. This has often occurred in history. We have examples in the rise of the Samaritans, and in the formation of the Roman people. And in modern times, we have a similar instance in the subjugation of the Gauls by the Franks. We see that the footsteps of God are to be traced throughout all human history. Those nations which lay outside the covenant people were yet under the care and control of that Divine providence which appointed the bounds of their habitation, and watched over their growth and development. (Acts xvii. 26).

V. We learn, also, the importance of the individual element in history. The personal or individual element appears in all history, but in a most marked manner in sacred history. We see how nations are stamped with the character of their ancestor. At the close of this record of the evolution of a great people, we read, "He is Esau, the father of the Edomites." He still lives in this people. His character is stamped upon the entire race. This principle was illustrated with better issues in the case of Israel. Balaam felt that they were an holy nation. The character of their ancestors was impressed upon them. "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel." (Num. xxiii. 21).

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. There is an important moral in these *generations of Esau.* They show that the families of the *carnal* race of this world develop themselves *more rapidly* than the promised seed. Ishmael and Esau come sooner to their possession than Isaac and Jacob. The promised seed is of slow growth. It is like the grain of mustard-seed. (Matt. xiii. 31.) The fulfilments of all God's promises of great blessings to His people are always long in coming. But the kingdoms of this world would soon fade, while the kingdom of heaven will endure for ever.—(*Wordsworth.*)

Verse 7. A similar reason is given for the parting of Abraham and Lot. Esau's prosperity was the means, in the hands of Providence, of leading him beyond the promised land, so that it might come into the possession of him to whom God had given it. So that prosperity, which we may sometimes be tempted to envy in others, may yet be the means by which God works out His gracious will concerning us.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Critical Notes.—3. The son of his old age.] He was ninety years old when Joseph was born. A coat of many colours.] Heb. *A tunic of parts.* The expression occurs again in 2 Sam. xiii. 18, to describe the garment worn by kings' daughters. "This was a coat reaching to the hands and feet, worn by persons not much occupied with manual labour, according to the general opinion. It was, we conceive, variegated either by the loom or the needle, and is therefore well rendered χιτὼν ποικίλος, a motley coat." (*Murphy*.)—**4. And could not speak peaceably unto him.**] The meaning is, that they refused to bid him good day, or to greet him with the usual salutation, "Peace be with thee."—**9. The eleven stars.**] Joseph himself being the twelfth. Knobel concludes from this that the signs of the Zodiac were not unknown to the Israelites. **11. But his father observed the saying.**] Heb. "Kept the word, or the matter" The word *observed*, as rendered by the LXX., is very nearly the same word as that used by St. Luke, "His mother *kept* all these things." (St. Luke ii. 19.)—**12 Shechem.** It was over fifty miles from Hebron. Jacob had formerly bought a piece of ground there. (Gen. xxxiii. 19.)—**14. See whether it be well with thy brethren**] Heb. "See the peace or the welfare," *i.e.*, Go and see how it fares with thy brethren and the flocks.—**17. Dothan.**] A town about twelve miles north of Shechem. It is only mentioned in one other place, 2 Kings vi. 13-19.—**18. Conspired.**] Heb. "Cunningly plotted."—**19. This dreamer.**] Heb. "Lord, or master of dreams;" using the title in bitter scorn.—**23. They stript Joseph of his coat.**] "According to Eastern habits, it would be his only garment. He entered Egypt naked, as was the custom with slaves and captives (Isa. xx. 4), in strange contrast to his subsequent array of pomp. (Gen. xli. 42.) (*Alford*.)—**25. Ishmaelites.**] In verse 28 and in Gen. xxxix. 1, they are called Midianites. The caravan consisted, probably, of both of these. The general meaning is, "Arabian Merchants." *Gilead.* Celebrated for a precious balm. (Jer. viii. 22; xlvi. 11.) *Spicery.* This is a species of gum called *tragacanth. Balm.* It was a very precious gum obtained from the balsam tree, almost peculiar to Palestine. (*Alford*.)—*Myrrh.* Gum, *laudanum.* **28. Twenty pieces of silver.**] The price of a lad under twenty years of age. (Lev. xxvii. 5.) The full price of a slave was thirty shekels. (Ex. xxi. 32.) **35. The grave.**] Heb. *Sheol.* The unseen world, or the place of departed spirits. The A.V. also renders this word in some places *hell*, in others *the pit*. Probably derived from Heb. verb *sha-al*, to ask or inquire. It is that condition in which we *ask* after the lost ones. Where are they? Others derive it from a word which means *cavity* or *pit*. It is ever craving, never satisfied, demanding the whole human race.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-17.

THE COMMENCEMENT OF JOSEPH'S HISTORY.

The history of Joseph commences at the opening of this chapter, and continues throughout the book. It is important, as showing how the Hebrew spirit came in contact with Egyptian culture and literature. Here we have Joseph brought before us—

I. As distinguished by his early piety. Even at this opening of Joseph's history we can discover the signs of a high moral and devout tone of character. His brethren were of a different spirit. They were not only undevout, but were ready to commit the vilest wickedness. Joseph saw and heard things, when he was with them in the field, which vexed his righteous soul. He felt the duty laid upon him to bring report of their conversation and behaviour to their father. This was not malicious tale-bearing, but the faithful performance of a sense of duty. For, where wickedness is done it ought not to be concealed. Joseph's conduct was not back-biting, but a filial confidential report to his father. 1. *It showed his love of truth and right.* He would not suffer his father to be deceived by a false estimate of the conduct of his sons. He must be made acquainted with the truth, however painful, or be the consequences what they might to all concerned. 2. *It showed his unwillingness to be a partaker of other men's sins.* 3. *It showed a spirit of ready obedience.* He knew that a faithful report of the conduct of his brethren was a duty he owed to his father. He had learned filial reverence and obedience. How readily he obeyed his father's command when he was sent upon that long journey to Shechem. (Verse 14). He entered upon the journey in all the simplicity of his heart, expecting no evil. Joseph was not entirely a spoiled child, kept at home safe from all dangers. His father had a healthy confidence in a son who was accustomed to obey cheerfully. He believed that Joseph had some hardy virtues.

II. As marked out for a great destiny. Joseph relates two of his dreams. There was no difficulty in understanding their meaning. The first showed that his brethren were to be in subjection to him, and the second that he would even have a wider dominion—his father, his mother, and his brethren bowing down before him to the earth. These dreams must be regarded as Divine intimations of his future sovereign greatness, and they were remarkably fulfilled in Egypt twenty-three years afterwards. Though Jacob chided his son for the bold uttering of his dreams, yet we are told that he "observed the saying." (Verses 10, 11). He had a secret persuasion that those dreams were prophetic. And the hatred of his brethren shows a dreaded suspicion of the same prophetic import. It may not have been a shrewd policy in Joseph boldly to utter and declare these dreams before those with whom they were so intimately concerned. But he was a youth of genuine simplicity and transparency of character. He was openly honest. He had a natural fitness for future distinction and honour, and so the choice of God is justified to men.

III. As the object of envy and hatred. 1. *Because of his faithful testimony.* He did not join in the company of his brethren. They perceived that there was some alteration in their father's conduct towards them, and would naturally suspect that his favourite son would be their accuser. So the world hated Jesus, because "He testified of it that the works thereof were evil." 2. *Because of his father's partiality.* (Verse 4.) There was much in this that was injudicious, but it was not altogether unreasonable. Joseph was the child of the wife most beloved. His disposition was of that kind which naturally wins affection. He was the only one among his brethren who had the fear of God, or knew the duty of a son. 3. *Because of the distinction for which God had destined him.* They envied him the honour which they plainly saw God had intended for him. To take it away from Joseph would not have been of any benefit to them. But such is the spirit of envy which refuses to admire, or have any complacency in that which does not belong to self. How hard it is to submit to the decisions of Providence! That spirit of hatred and envy which his brethren showed towards Joseph was like that of Cain towards Abel, of Esau towards Jacob, of Saul towards David, and of the Scribes and Pharisees towards Our Lord.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. The character of sojourners is common to all the patriarchs. Jacob afterwards claimed and confessed his character as a pilgrim before Pharaoh. "They who say such things plainly declare that they seek a country."

The dukes of Edom had habitations in the land of their possessions. (Gen. xxxvi. 43). But Jacob, with his father Isaac, were pilgrims in the land of Canaan; content to dwell in tents here that they might dwell with God for ever. Justin Martyr saith of the Christians of his time: "They dwell in their own countries but as strangers; have right to all, as citizens; but suffer hardship, as foreigners."—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 2. The unsophisticated child of home is prompt in the disapproval of evil, and frank in the avowal of his feelings. What the evil was we are not informed; but Jacob's full-grown sons were now far away from the paternal eye, and prone, as it seems, to give way to temptation. Many scandals came out to view in the chosen family.—(*Murphy.*)

Joseph only bore tidings to his father of conduct which had already become notorious and of ill-fame.

Verses 3, 4. In God's government there is election, but no favouritism; for God judges by character. But turning to the conduct of Jacob, we find something different. True, Joseph was superior to his brethren, but there was something more; he was the son of the favourite wife and therefore the favourite child. His coat was the badge of his father's unjust love, and therefore upon it his brethren wreaked their fury.—(*Robertson.*)

I see in him not a clearer type of Christ than of every Christian. Because we are dear to our Father, and complain of sins, therefore we are hated of our carnal brethren. If Joseph had not meddled with his brother's faults, yet he had been envied for his father's affection; but now malice is met with envy.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

Verses 5–11. Joseph's brethren hated him yet the more for his dreams. So the Jews did Jesus for His parables; especially when he spake of his exaltation.—(*Trapp.*)

The simplicity with which Joseph relates his dreams, reminds us of Isaac's naïve question on the way to Mount Moriah: "but where is the lamb?" It stands in beautiful contrast with that moral earnestness which had already, in early age, made him self-reliant in presence of his brethren.—(*Lange.*)

The concealment of our hopes or abilities hath not more modesty than safety. He that was envied for his dearness, and hated for his intelligence, was both envied and hated for his dreams. Surely God meant to make the relation of these dreams a means to effect that which the dreams imported. We men work by likely means; God by contraries. Had it not been for his dreams he had not been sold; if he had not been sold, he had not been exalted. Full little did Joseph's brethren think, when they sold him naked to the Ishmaelites, to have once seen him in the throne of Egypt. God's decree runs on; and, while we either think not of it, or oppose it, is performed.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

Envy is a specially diabolical sin. "Through envy of the devil death entered into the world. (Wisd. Sol. ii 24). 1. It is purely a spiritual sin, it is purely a *soul-sin*, owing less than any other to the temptations of the flesh. He whose chief delight is in intellectual pleasures, and is free from vulgar appetites, may yet be full of this sin of envy. 2. It is most essentially evil. Almost every other passion has in it some good, or seeming good. Revenge may claim justification from some sense of wrong, and be regarded as of near kin to justice. Anger may throw the blame upon violent passions so easily aroused. Carnal passions of every kind may charge their sins upon the body. But envy is an evil, pure and simple. It needs no body, nor nerves, nor foul desires, but springs up within the soul. 3. Other sins yield some present pleasure, but envy has nothing but torment.

Verses 12–17. He stayed not at Shechem, whither his father sent him; but missing them there, he seeks farther, till he found them. This is true obedience, whether to God or man, when we look not so much to the letter of the law, as to the mind of the lawmaker.—(*Trapp.*)

That dream of Joseph's regal sheaf, to which all the rest did homage, was remarkably fulfilled when his brethren came to him in Egypt for corn. They literally bowed down before him for this precious commodity.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 18–22.

THE CONSPIRACY TO MURDER JOSEPH.

The brethren of Joseph conspired against him to slay him. (Verse 18.) This foul crime furnishes—

I. An example of the rapidly downward course of evil. Joseph's brethren at first envied him, then envy passed into animosity, animosity into fixed hatred, and fixed hatred rapidly grew into a scheme of murder. So steep is the descent from the evil things within the heart of man to the lowest depths of crime.

II. An example of the bold daring of sinners. Joseph's brethren are prepared to brave all the consequences. They are ready with a deceitful story to account to their father for the loss of his favourite son. (Verse 20.) They trust to artifice, falsehood, cunning, and deceit. They are daring enough to cover up their crime with a lie.

III. An example of guilt incurred even where purpose has not ripened into act. Joseph's brethren were guilty of murder though they stopped short of the deed. Thought and act are the same in the sight of God. (Matt. v. 28.) It was not for killing his brother (for that might have been accidental), but for killing him through *hatred,* that Cain was branded a murderer. (1 John iii. 15.) Murder is the goal or limit to which hatred tends when not repressed. But these men were prevented from carrying out their purpose, not by unforeseen circumstances, not by fear at a sudden realization of the magnitude of their crime, but by the love of gain,—stronger in them than even their hatred and purpose of murder. It was not the voice of conscience, or the effect of grace, but the power of another passion that comes in here to stay the hand of crime. It was the triumph of avarice over malice. (Verses 27, 28.) One sin is sometimes cast out by another. Devils may be cast out by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils.

IV. An example of degrees of guiltiness even among those who have lent themselves to one design. The brethren of Joseph were not all equally guilty. Simeon, Levi, and others wished to slay him, but Judah proposed his being sold into captivity. (Verses 26, 27.) Reuben proposed to cast him into a pit, intending, probably, to fetch him out when the others were not by. He wanted to save Joseph, but secretly, for he had not courage enough to save him openly. All this shows that the brethren were not equally guilty, though the motive of the least culpable among them was not superior virtue, but some softness of character, or the influence of a stronger temptation.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 18. In an honest and obedient simplicity, Joseph comes to inquire of his brethren's health, and now may not return to carry news of his own misery: whilst he thinks of their welfare, they are plotting his destruction. Who would have expected this cruelty in them, which should be the fathers of God's church?—(*Bp. Hall.*)

Cain has left a name of infamy to all generations of mankind. But where shall we find nine men conspiring at once to kill a brother—a brother whose amiable qualities deserved their warmest love — who tenderly loved them, and was in the very act of showing his love to them at the time when their fury broke loose upon him. Joseph had too good reason, as David afterwards had to say in the person of Christ, "For my love they are mine adversaries."—(*Bush.*)

Verses 19, 20. Who will say that the workers of iniquity have no knowledge? They have all the cunning as well as the cruelty of the old serpent. But what do they mean by that sarcastic saying, *we shall see what will become of his dreams*? If they had considered them as feigned through ambition, they would not have felt half the resentment. They considered these dreams as the intimations of heaven, and their language included nothing less than a challenge to the Almighty. But is it possible that they could think of thwarting the Divine counsels? It is possible. Witness Pharaoh's pursuit of Israel, after all that he had seen and felt of the Divine judgments; Saul's attempts on David's life; Herod's murder of the children of Bethlehem; and the conspiracy of the Jews against Christ, who, as many of them knew had raised Lazarus from the dead, and done many miracles. Yes, we will kill him, say they, and then let God advance him to honour if He can! But they shall see what will become of his dreams. They shall see them accomplished by the very means they are concerting to overthrow them. Thus, though the kings of the earth take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh at them, the Lord shall have them in derision. Joseph's brethren, like the sheaves in the dream, should make obeisance to him; and at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.—(*Fuller.*)

Verses 21, 22. Reuben, though he had been very wicked (Gen. xxxv. 22), shows now a tender heart.—(*Jacobus.*)

As the murderous scheme was prevented by Reuben's plan of deliverance, and modified by Judah's proposal, so, in the life of our Lord, the scheme of the Sanhedrin was changed more than once by arresting circumstances. Thus Providence turned the destructive plots to a beneficent end. It was the chief tendency of these schemes to promote the highest glory of the hated one, whose glory they aimed to destroy.—(*Lange.*)

He was not cruel, simply because he was guilty of a different class of sin. It is well for us, before we take credit to ourselves for being free from this or that sin, to inquire whether it be banished by grace or only by another sin. You are not censorious, but then pause and ask whether you are not too lax to be censorious. You are not a tale-bearer or a busybody, but are you certain that you have in you sufficient love for others to make you at all interested in these matters?—(*Robertson.*)

That weakness of character for which Reuben was remarkable, had also its good side. It rendered him incapable of committing some sins.

Verses 23, 24. It was not enough to injure him, they must also insult him. Thus Jesus was stripped and degraded before He suffered. Now it was, as they afterwards confessed one to another in the Egyptian prison, that they saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought them, and they would not hear. (Gen. xlii. 21.)—(*Fuller.*)

How dearly did he purchase this honour bestowed upon him by his father! They no doubt considered it as an insult to themselves that he came to them decked with this trophy of his superior standing in the patriarch's regard. His robe, the evidence of Jacob's tender regard, might have reminded them that to murder Joseph was in effect to murder their father. It would deprive him of the comfort of life and fill up all the rest of his days with bitterness and sorrow.—(*Bush.*)

The Lord delivers His people from the pit of their sins and sorrows.—(Zech. ix. 11.)

All the spite of his brethren cannot make Joseph cast off the livery of his father's love. What need we care for the censures of men, if our hearts can tell us we are in favour with God?—(*Bp. Hall.*)

Verse 25. To weep for their wickedness, they should have sat down rather. But the devil had drawn a hard hoof over their hearts, that either they felt no remorse of what they had done, for the present; or else they sought to ease themselves of it by eating and merrymaking. "They drank wine in bowls, but no man was sorry for the affliction of Joseph." (Amos vi. 6).—(*Trapp.*)

Observe the calmness of these men after their crime. We often think respecting the tyrants of whom we read in history, that they must have been haunted by the furies. It is not so, there is a worse doom for sin than this; it is that it makes the heart callous and forgetful of its presence. If there were but the sting it would be well, for it would lead to reformation.—(*Robertson.*)

Egypt was their market. This agrees with the testimony of classic historians, as *Homer* and *Herodotus*, who tells us that Egypt was a storehouse for drugs, and a seat of physicians.—(*Jacobus.*)

Verse 26. It were to be wished, that whenever we are tempted to sin, we would ask ourselves this question, What profit is it?—(*Trapp.*)

Verses 27, 28. Judah's proposal contains words of mercy, but it was mercy mixed with covetousness. It is not unusual for covetous men to urge their objects under a show of generosity and kindness. But if he did, it was the "profit" that wrought upon the company. The love of money induced them to sell their brother for a slave. A goodly price at which they valued him! But let not Joseph complain, seeing a greater than he was sold by Judas Iscariot for but a little more.—(*Fuller.*)

Reuben and Judah remind us of Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus, who did not consent to the sentence of the Sanhedrin; but they were less inclined to the right, and their half measures remind us of Pilate's attempt to save, though they had not, like him, the power in their hands; since being implicated by their former animosity towards Joseph, they could only weakly oppose their angry brethren.—(*Lange.*)

Little did the Ishmeelitish merchants know what a treasure they bought, carried, and sold; more precious than all their balms and myrrhs. Little did they think that they had in their hands the lord of Egypt, the jewel of the world. Why should we contemn any man's meanness, when we know not his destiny?—(*Bp. Hall.*)

The saints of God are His princes, His portion, His heirs; but they are in a strange country; they are unknown in the world.

These merchantmen testify to the outward increase and spiritual decrease of the descendants of Ishmael. They are witnesses to a heartrending scene, but coolly pay their twenty pieces of silver, reminding us of the thirty paid by Judas, then go their way with the poor lad, who passes his home without hope of deliverance, and is for a long time, like Moses, David, and Christ, reckoned among the lost.—(*Lange.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 29–36.

JACOB'S GRIEF FOR HIS SON.

I. It was deep and overwhelming. Jacob had felt many a sorrow before, had mourned over the loss of those who were dear, but this sorrow went the deepest to his heart. The other calamities which fell upon him seemed to be more directly from the hand of God. They were to be expected in the ordinary course of Providence. But this fatality which happened to his beloved son would raise in him painful and inevitable self-questionings, and a sad sense of self condemnation. He could impute the blame to no one but himself. Why did he let the boy go alone on such a journey? Why did he send him without protection into a country abounding in wild beasts? Of course *our* sympathy is relieved when we know that Jacob's sorrows were founded upon no real ground of fact. But it was all real to him. This was the saddest sorrow of all.

II. It was inconsolable. "He refused to be comforted." (Verse 35.) It seemed now as if his whole house had been given over to destruction, every prospect ruined! He speaks as one who had lost all hope in life. To allow grief to overwhelm the soul, and sink it into such depths of sorrow, betokens a want of confidence in God and in the power of His supporting grace. Eminent saints may have grievous afflictions, but even then they should not speak of them as insupportable. God had dispelled many dark clouds for Jacob before, and he should not have given way to despondency now.

III. It cast him upon the future. He ought to have sought God's consolations in this world, though he looked to the future for full satisfaction and recompence. But he renounced the hope of seeing any more good in what remained to him of this present life. "I will go down," he said, "into the grave unto my son mourning." The word rendered "grave" is the Heb. *Sheol*, the place to which the souls of men depart after death, and where they await God. Jacob did not expect to go to his son in the grave, for (as he believed) Joseph had no grave. The Hebrews had a well-known word for "grave" (Gen. xxiii. 9), which would have been employed here had it been intended to convey the idea of the last resting-place of the body. Surely Jacob looked beyond the grave, where was assembled the congregation of the fathers who had resigned their souls to God. The form of the Heb. word has the idea of direction, *Sheol-ward*. Thus he speaks of his life as passing on to that unknown land. He does not contemplate a state of non-existence. Joseph was still his son. There was a tie still between them. Each had a personality undestroyed. His son had a being somehow and somewhere. Jacob had learned from the promises of the Covenant that God was his God, and surely he must have felt the conviction that this sacred relationship would not end at death, but last on for ever. "He is not a God of the dead, but of the living," for all live unto Him." (Luke xx. 37, 38.)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses **29, 30.** His intentions were good, and his plan seemed to be well concerted, but it was not successful. It was not by Reuben that Joseph was to be delivered; he must yet pass through a deep scene of affliction before he obtains that glory for which he was destined. God often blasts the designs that are formed for the good of His people, not because He frowns upon them, but because the whole work is not yet accomplished which He intends to accomplish by their afflictions.—(*Bush.*)

The day came when Joseph's brethren were compelled to hear Reuben and to remember bitterly this time.—(Gen. xlii. 22).

Verses **31, 32.** They could not deny themselves the brutal pleasure of thus insulting their father, even in the hour of his distress, for his former partiality.—(*Fuller.*)

Verses **33, 34.** Seldom does misfortune come alone. It is but a short time since Jacob was deprived of Rachel; now he has lost Joseph. In such a concealment of guilt they pass twenty-two years.—(*Lange.*)

It is no evil beast, but men more cruel than tigers that have done towards him what is done; but thus Jacob thought, and thus he mourned. We are ready to wonder how Reuben could keep his counsel; yet with all his grief he did so; perhaps he might be afraid of his own life.—(*Fuller.*)

Verse **35.** Joseph's brethren add sin to sin, and dare to cover all with the infamous hypocrisy of comforting their father, when they themselves were the cause of his grief.

Jacob renounced the hope of seeing any more good in this world when his choicest comfort in life was taken away. He had the prospect of no days of gladness when Joseph, the joy of his heart, was torn in pieces by wild beasts. But he did not know what joys were yet before him in the recovery of his long lost son. We know not what joys or what sorrows are before us. It is rash, therefore, to prejudge the allotments of Providence, to infer the permanence of what we now feel. At any rate, we have no reason to despond while God's throne continues firm and stable in heaven.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 36. Little did the Egyptians dream that their future lord was come to be sold in their country; still less did they know the dignity and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ when He was brought into their country by another Joseph, and by Mary his wife. Time brings the real characters and dignity of some men to light.—(*Bush.*)

Little knew Joseph what God was in doing. Have patience, till He have brought both ends together.—(*Trapp*).

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Critical Notes.—**1. Turned in.]** (*Heb.*) "And he pitched," *i.e.*, his tent. He came to dwell in the near neighbourhood of a man belonging to the small kingdom of Adullam (Josh. xii. 15; xv. 25.) **2. Whose name was Shuah.]** This is not the name of Judah's wife, but of her father. **8. Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother.]** This was according to the custom of the Levirate marriage, which was afterwards legalised by Moses. So called from the Latin *levir*, a brother-in-law. **12. Unto his sheep-shearers to Timnath.]** A town in the mountain country of Judah, seven miles south of Hebron. The sheep-shearing was a holiday with the shepherds. **18. Thy bracelets.]** (*Heb.*) *Strings.* The signet-ring or seal was suspended from the neck with a silk string, and worn inside the garments. (Cant. viii. 6; Jer. xxii. 24; Hag. ii. 23.) **21. The harlot.]** "The name by which Hirah calls her is literally a holy woman. In the horrid religious rites of the Goddess Ashtoreth, the priestesses or female devotees were harlots, who sat and solicited the passers-by. (Jer. iii. 2; Ezek. xvi. 25; Barach vi. 43.") (*Alford.*) **23. Let her take it to her.]** The meaning is, let her keep the pledge for herself. **24. Let her be burnt.]** "The punishment of burning for unchastity was afterwards by the law reserved for the daughters of priests. (Lev. xxi. 9.) And Knobel thinks that this sentence was pronounced upon Tamar as being now by marriage one of the holy race. Had she merely been punished as the betrothed of Selah, she would have been stoned. (Lev. xx. 10; Deut. xxii. 23; Ezek. xvi. 40; John viii. 5.") (*Alford.*) **29. Pharez.]** A breach. "Perez, in the struggle before birth obtained the primogeniture, and in the tenth generation, David the King of Israel, descended from him. (Ruth iv. 18-22.) *Tamar*, therefore, has a place as one of the female ancestors in the genealogy of Jesus Christ." (*Jacobus.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-30.

THE CHARACTER OF JUDAH.

The story of Joseph is interrupted at this point, for the purpose of giving some particulars concerning the family history of Judah. This account is not to be considered merely as an episode, but rather as a parallel history, all belonging to the wider history of the sons of Israel. The chief points of Judah's character are here illustrated.

I. Faithlessness towards God. This is seen,—1. *In his separation from his brethren.* "Judah went down from his brethren." (Verse 1.) This was an act of wilful indiscretion, and dangerous to his spiritual interests. He leaves the family where God was known and honoured, and forms a close friendship with a Canaanite. 2. *In his marriage with an idolator.* (Verse 2.) He had objected to his sister's marriage with Shechem, and yet he marries this woman, and that without consulting his father. Such connections as these were forbidden to the covenant family, who were to be a separated people. These alliances were corrupting, and dangerous to the highest interests of the people of God. We have a sad illustration in the children born from this marriage. Judah was the first of Israel's sons who took this false step. He was weary of the restraints of religion.

II. A strong sensual nature. We have a melancholy illustration of this in the account of his incestuous intercourse with Tamar. (Verses 12–18.) Judah had already become heathenish by his unlawful connections, and was easily seduced.

III. An underlying sense of justice. He had not sunk into that lowest depth of degradation in which the conscience is seared, and there is no longer any sense of, or concern for, righteousness. He scrupled not to acknowledge his guilt, and the superior sense of justice shown by his daughter-in-law. (Verse 26.) "He now acknowledges that in withholding his son from the widow and denying her right, he had brought about this shameful and sad result. It is evident from the narrative that she was driven to this stratagem, not from base lewdness, but to obtain through Judah himself the covenant posterity of which he was wrongfully depriving her." (*Jacobus.*) Judah had also enough sense of religious obligation left to keep up the customs of the covenant family which were wisely ordained for its preservation. (Verse 8.) This was an important provision in its bearing upon the supreme purpose for which the race of Israel was chosen. (Ruth iv. 10–12; compare also with verses 18–22.) "Onan, however, proved false, and his crime of violating God's ordinance by a shameful abomination was also punished with death. Thus the covenant household seems degraded and disgraced. But the salvation lies not with them, but with God." (*Jacobus.*)

IV. Self-dependence. Judah's was a strong character. He was a headlong, rushing man, with great power in him for evil or for good.

THE LESSONS OF JUDAH'S HISTORY.

I. God's cause has in it the seeds of triumph even when it seems to fail. At the close of the last chapter Joseph appears to be altogether lost. In like manner, here, Judah appears to be lost—the hope of his posterity clean gone for ever. Yet, as the history unfolds, we shall find signs of future greatness both in Joseph and Judah. The tribe appeared to be extinguished, but the purpose of God shall still be accomplished. So in the cross the cause of Christ seemed to fail; His life and teaching but, at best, a pleasing memory, or it may be, a curious chapter in the history of enthusiasm. But *that*, in the design of God and in actual result, was the hour of His sublime triumph. Thereby was He "the power of God, and the wisdom of God." (1 Cor. i. 24.)

II. God's judgments on the sin of unchastity. Judah is disgraced both in himself and in his sons. There is a stain upon the family honour.

III. This history has an important bearing upon God's purpose of salvation. This history derives its importance and justifies its place in the sacred record, from the fact that Christ sprang from the tribe of Judah. The minutest circumstances connected with the ancestors of the promised seed have a lasting interest. Considered in regard to God's redeeming purpose, this history shows—1. *That God's election is by grace.* Otherwise Judah would not have been chosen as the ancestor of Christ. It shows—2. *The native glory of Christ.* He derives all His glory from Himself, and not from His ancestry. It shows—3. *The amazing condescension of Christ.* The greatest and most shameful sinners are found in His birth-register. He "despised the shame," and "made Himself of no reputation." The strong purpose of His love can triumph over the worst evils of human sin. Luther asks, "Why did God the Holy Ghost permit these shameful things to be written? Answer: That no one should be proud of his own righteousness and wisdom; and, again, that no one should despair on account of his sins. It may be, also, to remind us that by natural right, Gentiles, too, are the mother, brothers, sisters of our Lord."

THE SIN OF ONAN.—*Verses* 8–10.

I. It was prompted by a low motive. It was as selfish as it was vile. Onan's design was to preserve the whole inheritance for his own house.

II. It was an act of wilful disobedience to God's ordinance. "Ill deservings of others can be no excuse for our injustice, for our uncharitableness. That which Tamar required, Moses afterward, as from God, commanded—the succession of brothers into the barren bed. Some laws God spake to His Church long ere He wrote them: while the author is certainly known, the voice and the finger of God are worthy of equal respect."—*(Bp. Hall.)*

III. It was a dishonour done to his own body. "Unchastity in general is a homicidal waste of the generative powers, a demonic bestiality, an outrage to ancestors, to posterity, and to one's own life. It is a crime against the image of God, and a degradation below the animal. Onan's offence, moreover, as committed in marriage, was a most unnatural wickedness, a grievous wrong, and a desecration of the body as the temple of God. It was a proof of the most defective development of what may be called the consciousness of personality, and of personal dignity."—*(Lange.)*

IV. It was aggravated by his position in the covenant family. The Messiah was to descend from the stock of Judah, and for aught he knew from himself. This very Tamar is counted in the genealogy of Christ. (Matt. i. 3.) Herein he did despite to the covenant promise. He rejected an honourable destiny.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 8. The Levirate law. An endeavour to preserve families, even in their separate lines, and to retain the thereby inherited property, pervades the laws of the Israelites—a feeling that doubtless came down from the patriarchs. The father still lived on in the son; the whole family descending from him was, in a certain sense, himself; and, through this, the place among the people was to be preserved. From the remotest antiquity so much depended upon the preservation of tradition, upon the inheritance of religion, education, and custom, that these things were never regarded as the business of individuals, but of families and nations. The first motive for the patriarchial custom, or for Judah's idea, comes, doubtless, *from a struggle of faith in the promise with death.* As the promise is to the seed of Abraham, so death seems to mar the promise when he carries away some of Jacob's sons, especially the first-born, before they have had offspring. Life thus enters into strife with death, whilst the remaining brothers fill up the blank. The second motive, however, is connected with the fact, *that the life of the deceased is to be reflected in the future existence of their names in this world.* Israel's sons are a church of the undying. There is a third motive; it is *to introduce the idea of spiritual descent.* The son of the surviving brother answers for the legitimate son of the dead, and thus the way is prepared for the great extension of the adoptive relationship, according to which Jesus is called the Son of Joseph, and mention is made of the brothers of Jesus. The institution, however, being typical, it could not be carried through consistently in opposition to the right of personality. A particular coercive marriage would have been at war with the idea of the law itself. (Deut. xxv. 5–10; Ruth iv. 7.)—(*Lange.*)

Verses 12–14. That Tamar desired Shelah to be given to her was not unreasonable; but her course in thus avenging herself is by no means approved, though some of the Christian fathers (Chrysostom, Ambrose, Theodoret), praise her on this very account, and ascribe her design to a peculiar desire to become the mother of the Messiah.—(*Lange.*)

Tamar seeks by subtilty that which she could not have by award of justice. The neglect of due retributions drives men to indirect courses; neither know I whether they sin more in righting themselves wrongfully, or the other in not righting them.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

Verse 16. Three women only are mentioned in the genealogy of Christ. Rahab, the harlot; Bathsheba, the adulteress, and this incestuous Tamar (Matt. i.); to show His readiness to receive the most notorious offenders that come unto Him with bleeding and believing hearts. (1 Tim. i. 15.)—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 23. Shame is the easiest wages of sin, and the surest, which ever begins first in ourselves. Nature is not more forward to commit sin, than willing to hide it.—(*Bishop Hall.*)

Verse 26. God will find a time to bring His children upon their knees, and to wring from them penitent confessions; and rather than He will not have them soundly ashamed, He will make them the trumpets of their own reproach.—(*Bishop Hall.*)

And he knew her again no more. An assurance of the sincerity of his repentance.

Inasmuch as Hebrew customs afterwards sanctioned by the law, (Lev. xviii. 15; xx. 12), condemned such an act as incest, he repeated it not.—(*Alford.*)

Most commentators regard the saying of the midwife as allusive to the division of the kingdom, by which a breach was made in the sovereignty of the house of David which came of the line of Pharez.—(*Alford.*)

The Jewish writers say, "In Pharez the strength of David's house was portended; and therefore from him proceedeth the Kingdom of the house of David."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Critical Notes.—1. **Pharaoh.**] The name is derived from *Phra*, meaning the *sun*. *Potiphar* means *belonging to the sun.*—2. **The Lord.**] Jehovah. This, the covenant name of God, is here, for the first time, introduced into Joseph's history.—6. **And he knew not aught he had, save the bread which he did eat.**] Heb. *Knew not anything with him.* He did not insist upon a personal knowledge of his affairs, but left everything to Joseph. "But this committal of his affairs to Joseph did not extend to anything concerning his food, for that would have been an abomination." (Gen. xliii. 32.) (*Alford.*)—9. **Sin against God.**] Joseph uses the common name for God in addressing this Egyptian.—11. **About this time.**] Heb. *At this day.* The day on which the occurrence now related took place. 14. **An Hebrew.**] "A *Hebrew* is still the only national designation proper to Joseph. (Gen. xiv. 13.) Jacob's descendants had not got beyond the family. The term Israelite was therefore not yet in use. The national name is designedly used as a term of reproach among the Egyptians." (Gen. xliii. 32.) (*Murphy.*)

—15. **Left his garment with me.**] "Not in her hand, which would have been suspicious." (*Murphy.*)—20. **The prison.**] Heb. *House of roundness*, or *round-house*. Called a "dungeon." (Gen. xli. 14.) *A place where the king's prisoners were bound.* An added explanation —22. **Keeper of the prison.**] An inferior officer who was charged with the actual discipline of the prison.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-6.

THE PROSPERITY OF JOSEPH IN THE HOUSE OF HIS FIRST MASTER.

I. Its extraordinary nature. Here was a man who had everything against him. A youth of seventeen years of age, torn from his father, from home and country, and sold as a slave among idolators; what condition could be more hopeless and forlorn? And yet this youth is raised from his low and mean estate to the highest place in his master's house, and has unlimited confidence reposed in him. He prospers to a wonderful extent, and causes all around him to prosper. (Verses 2, 3.) Cast off by his own brethren, he rises amongst strangers to dignity and honour.

II. Its basis and security. How are we to account for this young man rising thus in the face of every disadvantage? 1. *By his own bearing and conduct.* Surely Joseph must have been cheerful and resigned under his hard lot. He must have made himself agreeable to his master by his diligence in business, and by a brave and manly behaviour. He had nothing of the meanness of the slave about him. His great character shined through every outward disadvantage, and charmed and impressed all who came under its influence. He was a noble example of one who was completely resigned to the will of God in affliction. In the day of adversity he would consider, and be quiet in his confidence, bating no jot of heart or hope; but still bearing up and trusting the faithfulness of his God. Firm faith in the revelations made to him of his coming greatness sustained him in the midst of overwhelming adversities. There was nothing like fretfulness about this man; for a gloomy and peevish spirit would not have won the admiration of his master. Joseph rose to influence by the force of character. 2. *By the favour of God.* It was the grace of God that made his character what it was, and imparted to it an energy for good. That grace, in the form of favour and blessing, made Joseph prosperous. "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man" The Covenant Jehovah was with him, his portion, his guide, his stay and support. He was like the tree planted by the rivers of water. "Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." (Ps. i. 1, 3.) He was robbed of all society but that of his God. He left behind him father and home, but he took God with him. He could be persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. Surely he could say in the spirit of the words of the Psalmist: "When my father and mother forsake me, then Jehovah will take me up."

III. Its lessons. 1. *That God's blessings and grace are with His people everywhere, and under the severest trials.* The grace of God was seen in the noble bearing of Joseph in adversity, and the blessing of God in that prosperity which he gained. No exile, no stroke of adversity can deprive God's saints of their best comforts.

2. *That God's blessing and grace in His people are manifest to others.* "His master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord had made all that he did to prosper in his hand." (Verse 3.) The spiritual convictions of Joseph, which made his outward life what it was, were recognised by his master. He felt that he was in the presence of a goodness which was uncommon and

superior, and which could only be traced to a Divine spring. Such is the power of a saintly character which compels the world to ascribe it to the grace of God. If a man love the Lord, the same is known of him. The saints of God though hid as to their deepest feelings, and the Divine source of their strength, cannot be hid as to the influence of their lives and the impressions of their character. They are public lights. They compel observation, like a city set upon a hill which cannot be hid. It is to Joseph's credit that his goodness was manifest to all, for this implies that he did not hide his religion. It is probable that he took his stand at once as a worshipper of the true God. The Lord gave him the hearts of all. "Them that honour me I will honour." (1 Sam ii. 30.)

3. *That God blesses others for the sake of His people.* His kindness overflows to those who, by His providence, are brought into relations with them. The Egyptian's house is blessed for Joseph's sake. (Verse 5.) God blesses those who bless His own people, according to the promise. (Gen. xii. 3.) *He makes His saints a blessing.* Thus was Jacob made to Laban; Joseph to the house of Potiphar, and afterwards to all Egypt; Israel to the world. "Salvation is of the Jews."

4. *That God is still working out His designs, even when they seem to fail.* The hope of the house of Israel centered upon Joseph; and now, to all human appearance, all was lost. But God, though hidden for awhile in the mysterious way of His providence, was working out His own purposes. His wisdom would yet be manifest. Had the House of Jacob remained in Canaan, they would, in all probability, have been dispersed among the people, have lost their unity and independence, and been wasted by numerous wars. In Egypt they would grow up into a great and united people, and receive the advantage of an important educational influence by being brought into contact with that seat of culture and worldly power. They would thus acquire the elements of political strength. Even the afflictions which were visited upon them worked for their good, by drawing them closer together and thus preserving their unity, and by awakening in them a longing after redemption. The destiny of the church has often seemed, to merely human eyes, to hang upon the frail thread of some threatened life; from such threads as Joseph in prison, Moses in the ark, David in the cave of Adullam. But the providence of God, like His mercy, is ever faithful, ever sure.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Joseph brought down to Egypt and sold as a slave—a dark Providence. But consider his own interpretation of it when he reviews it in the time to come. "Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God," etc. (Gen. xlv. 5, 7.) God orders all the ways of His people; and though they may seem to be forgotten, His eye is always upon them.

This was to Joseph "the day of his distress," as Jacob called that sad day when he departed from his father's house. Surely the archers may well be said to have *sorely grieved him.*

Verses 2, 3. The Covenant God victoriously carries forward His decrees through all the need, sufferings, and ignomony of His people.—(*Lange.*)

God's presence can make up for any loss, and bless us in any place.

What a difference is there between the case of Joseph and that of Jonah! They were both in trouble, both absent from God's people, and among the heathen; but the sufferings of the one were for righteousness sake, while those of the other were of his own procuring. —(*Fuller.*)

Prosperity is not always a sign of God's special favour, yet His hand is always to be recognised in it by His people, when He sees it would be better for them than adversity, or when, by means of it, He proposes to make them blessings to others.—(*Bush.*)

Potiphar was constrained to acknowledge that Joseph was the object of Divine care and favour. Here is an example to Christians to recommend the Gospel by their fidelity and diligence, and to be faithful to God even when there are no religious friends about them to watch over them.

Verse 4. Joseph's promotion illustrates—1. The principle, that he who is faithful over a few things shall be made ruler over many things. 2. The principle, that God honours those who honour Him. 3. That God was carrying out hereby His purpose of mercy towards the house of Jacob.

He that is mourned for in Canaan, as dead, prospers in Egypt under Potiphar; and of a slave, is made ruler. Thus God meant to prepare him for a greater charge; he must first rule Potiphar's house, then Pharaoh's kingdom.—(*Bishop Hall.*)

Verse 5. Joseph reminds us of St. Paul (2 Cor. vi), who through the persecutions of his brethren is forced to carry the light of God's kingdom into the heathen world.

Pious stewards, and pious servants of every class, are a blessing to their masters, not only because they are faithful and manage their affairs with discretion, but because they draw down the special blessing of God upon the households to which they belong. Masters may learn what treatment is due to faithful servants; they ought to trust, to honour, and to love them. When men are precious in God's sight they are honourable, whatever be their station in life.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 6. Potiphar took what was provided for him, and cared for no more. This is few men's happiness; for usually the master is the greatest servant in the house.—(*Trapp.*)

Beauty of person and face is a quality which gains love, and ought to make the possessor of it thankful; but it easily proves a snare. It was Joseph's comfort that he was beloved by his master, but it was his misfortune that he was too well beloved by his mistress.—(*Bush*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7–12.

THE TEMPTATION OF JOSEPH.

I. The strength of it. Joseph had been severely tried on the side of endurance of adversity, now he is tried by the more perilous temptation of sensuality. This was a most fierce temptation, when we consider—1. *His youth.* Joseph was young and of beautiful form and countenance. In youth endowed with high health and vigour the sensual passions are violent and impetuous. The temptation to gratify them is strong. 2. *The force of opportunity.* Joseph's beauty proved a snare to him. His master's wife "cast her eyes" upon him. (Verse 7.) He had not to seek to draw her into temptation. She solicited him. 3. *The prospect of advancement which his compliance would secure.* "He saw this pleasure would advance him: he knew what it was to be a minion of one of the greatest ladies in Egypt: yet resolves to contemn."—(*Bp. Hall.*) 4. *The repetition of the temptation.* It was renewed day by day. (Verse 10.) Many are able to withstand temptation in the first instance who yet fail to hold out to the end. Eve resisted the tempter at the first outset, but was overcome by the second. Samson refused at first to satisfy Delilah's insidious questions, but was at last conquered by the tears and importunities of that fair woman. The assaults of temptation may prevail even over sturdy virtue by repeated blows.

II. His resistance of it. Mark the grounds upon which he refuses the base proposal. He says nothing about the wickedness of the tempter. He utters no word of reproach for her sensuality and faithlessness; but simply considers his own obligation—what *he* ought to do. 1. *He pleads the law of honour.* His master had reposed great trust in him, and he must not abuse that confidence. (Verses 8, 9.) 2. *He pleads the law of chastity.* "How then can I do this great wickedness?" It was a moral wrong in itself, an invasion of the rights of another, a crime against society. 3. *He pleads the law of piety.* It was "a sin against God," a direct violation of His commandment. He recognises a supreme authority over human conduct. It would be trespass against heaven to break through God's distinct prohibition. He must be faithful to God as well as to man.

III. His victory over it. 1. *It was obtained by flight.* (Verse 12). He was firm in refusing, and yet he would not imperil his virtue by remaining in the neighbourhood of temptation. He would not expose his strength to too severe and to an unnecessary trial. Therefore he consulted his safety by taking to flight. Such flight is more honourable than the most heroic deeds. He who would avoid being vanquished by temptation must use his own prudence in taking the first way of escape. Divine aid is only for those who are willing to work in harmony with it. 2. *It was obtained through loss.* He retained a good conscience—the approval of God, but he lost his good name. His real character in the sight of God was preserved pure, but his reputation in the sight of men was gone. He would rather lie humbled in the dust, under the imputation of evil, than rise by sinful means. "How much had he rather leave his cloak than his virtue; and to suffer his mistress to spoil him of his liberty, rather than he should blemish her honour, or his master's in her, or God's in either of them?"—*(Bp. Hall.)*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 7. *After these things.* A man is to expect, if he live out his days, to be urged to all sins, to the breach of every branch of the ten commandments, and to be put to it in respect of every article of our creed.—(*Trapp.*)

The times of our advance in the world may prove the times of our greatest temptation.

Circe may enchant us, the cockatrice slay us with her sight. "Let her not take thee with her eyelids," saith Solomon (Prov. vi. 25); as larks, while they gaze in a glass, are taken in a day-net.—(*Trapp.*)

All the spite of his brethren was not so great a cross to him as the inordinate affection of his mistress.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

Verse 8. Joseph, as an example of chastity, stands here in the brightest light when compared with the conduct of Judah in the previous chapter.—(*Lange.*)

He refused, though this wicked woman could easily have taken her revenge upon him for it.

To argue from bounty to duty is but right reason; but to argue, as most do, from God's liberality to liberty in sin, is the devil's logic. Joseph will not deal so basely with his master, though an Egyptian. To render good for evil is divine; good for good is human, but evil for good is devilish. The "goodness of God should lead us to repentance," saith Paul. (Rom. ii. 4.) And this Peter picks out of Paul's Epistles, as one of the choicest sentences, and urged it upon those to whom he wrote. (2 Pet. iii. 15.)—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 9. He considers his obligation as heightened by the generosity and kindness of his master, who withheld nothing else from him. Eve reasoned at first on this principle (chap. iii. 2.), and had she kept to it, she had been safe. When we are tempted to covet what God has forbidden, it were well to think of the many things which He has not forbidden, but freely given us.—(*Fuller.*)

Though the iron entered into Joseph's soul, sin could not; because it was fraught with God's fear. He had "set God at his right hand," and "therefore he was not moved." (Ps. xvi. 18.) Satan knocked oft at that door, but there was none within to answer or open. He struck fire, but upon wet tinder. Joseph in Egypt, like a pearl in a puddle, keeps his virtue still, wherever he comes.—(*Trapp.*)

It will not only be treachery to my master on earth, but daring wickedness against my Master in heaven. God is our Maker and our Judge; and if honour required Joseph to be faithful to his master, much more did religion, which is a far stronger principle, oblige him to be faithful to his God; if gratitude bound him not to sin against the former, how much more strong ought that feeling be towards God?—(*Bush.*)

The fear of God is the keeper of all other virtues.

Verse 10. Joseph finds it necessary to shun her company. This showed—1. *His great sincerity*: for if we throw ourselves in the way of temptation, or be not careful to shun it when occasions offer, in vain do we talk against sin. 2. Great *wisdom*: for though he had been kept hitherto, he was not sure that he should be so in future. 3. Great *resolution and perseverance*: for it is not every one who withstands a temptation in the first instance that holds out to the end. Job endured a series of trials and sinned not; yet afterwards spake things which he ought not. 4. Great *grace*. "Can a man go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?" No; if we voluntarily *go* into temptation, we shall assuredly be hurt, if not ruined by it; but when God by His providence *leads* us into it for the trial of our graces, we may hope to be preserved in it, and brought victorious out of it.—(*Fuller.*)

Verses 11, 12. We are reminded here of Solomon's description of an impudent woman. (Prov. vii. 13–23).

The Church "comes from the wilderness," that is, through troubles and afflictions, leaning on her beloved. (Cant. viii. 5); choosing rather to suffer than to sin. The good heart goes in a right line to God, and will not fetch a compass, but strikes through all troubles and hazards to get to Him. It will not break the hedge of any commandment, to avoid any piece of foul way.—(*Trapp.*)

This second time is Joseph stript of his garment; before, in the violence of envy, now of lust; before, of necessity, now of choice; before, to deceive his father, now his master; for, behold the pledge of his fidelity, which he left in those wicked hands, is made an evidence against him, of that which he refused to do; therefore did he leave his cloak, because he would not do that of which he is accused and condemned, because he left it. What safety is there against great adversaries, when even arguments of innocence are used to convince of evil? Lust yielded unto is a pleasant madness, but is desperate madness when it is opposed; no hatred burns so furiously as that which arises from the quenched coals of love.—*(Bp. Hall.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13–18.

The False Charge against Joseph.

I. The boldness of it. With her consciousness of guilt, thus to set herself up as a model of immovable virtue, was a most daring boldness.

II. The malignity of it. The charge was preferred out of pure malignity. It was the vengeance of disappointed passion. She plots the destruction of a good man for no other reason but his incomparable virtues. No worse wickedness can be ascribed to the devil.

III. The art and cunning of it. She calls the servants and tells them her unblushing lie, so that they might be witnesses of the insult offered to her by this Hebrew. As the appearances were altogether against Joseph, they might consider themselves all but eye-witnesses of his guilt. She speaks to them in a contemptuous manner of her husband, throwing all the blame upon him; and she does not scruple even to impute the same to his face. "See, *he* hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us." "The Hebrew servant which *thou* hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me." (Verses 14, 17). She says nothing concerning the injury done to her husband, but charges him with being the cause of this attack upon her virtue. This would excite his wrath and put him upon the vindication of his honour. He would be ready to excuse her words spoken under the inspiration of the noble rage of offended virtue. Yet a discerning mind might perceive here that her cunning really overshot its mark. The fact that she speaks so disrespectfully of her husband reveals the estrangement of her heart from him, and also a design to annoy him by holding him up to the contempt of his servants.

IV. The lessons of this history. 1. *That impurity and falsehood are closely allied.* The devil, as he is an unclean spirit, so he is also a liar. This is the first example of gross calumniation recorded in Scripture, and it comes from an adulterous woman. 2. *That God's saints should be patient under false accusations.* All things concerning the righteous, even their persecutions, are under the control of God; and in the long run, He will vindicate their honour. He will bring forth their righteousness as the light, and their judgment as the noonday, though it may have been long hidden under the clouds of calumny. God may seem to bring His people down to the very grave, and yet He will surely bring them up. The 37th Psalm teaches us how we are to consider this affliction of Joseph. 3. *That we should do the thing that is right in utter disregard of all evil consequences to ourselves.* By maintaining his integrity and purity, Joseph exposed himself to the imputation of being regarded as a monster of iniquity. In the cause of righteousness he had literally to bear sin. But he heeded not consequences. He only thought of obligation. He bore the reputation of a sinner, but his record was on high, his judgment with his God. What we have to avoid is the sin itself; against the lie there may be found a remedy.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 13. The danger incurred by this was very obvious. Her resentment might improve it as the instrument of his destruction; or, if she endeavoured, for her own sake, to conceal it, an accident might probably discover it, and raise very dark suspicions against him. But convinced that sin was an infinitely worse evil than disgrace or death, he is determined to fly at all hazards.—(*Bush.*)

Verses 14–18. The disappointed passion of Potiphar's wife had settled down into malice. There are two kinds of love: that love which ever increases, and that which, usurping the name of love, contains within itself the germ of its own destruction.—(*Robertson*).

The demon of lust is soon converted into that of rage and revenge. (2 Sam. xiii. 15.)

Doubtless he denied the fact, but he dare not accuse the offender. There is not only the praise of patience, but oftimes of wisdom, even in unjust sufferings. He knew that God would find time to clear his innocence, and to regard his chaste faithfulness.—*Bp. Hall*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 19-23.

JOSEPH IN PRISON.

I. An example of the mysterious ways of Providence. The outward sufferings of Joseph were grievous. He was bound as well as imprisoned. They "hurt" his feet "with fetters." (Ps. cv. 18.) But his trouble went deeper than this. "The iron entered his soul." Though conscious of innocence, yet in the eyes of men he suffered as one guilty. He had to bear shame, and reproach, and punishment on account of his integrity and uprightness. All this time his enemies flourished and triumphed over him. Such is the mystery of Providence in all ages. The prizes of the world seem mostly to fall to the lot of the selfish and the sinful. The just is often made a prey to the sons of violence, and condemned to obscurity and failure, while the ungodly are in great prosperity and are borne to the stars by flatteries and applause. This has been the puzzle of God's people in all ages. When they have thought upon the dark ways of God's dealings here it has been a pain and grief to their souls. To all outward appearance, it is not justice, but the blindest and most undiscriminating chance that rules the world.

II. An example of the strength of God's consolations in the worst trials. Joseph had God's consolations within him which enabled him to bear up, and hope on, and press forward, even though he could not see his way before him. 1. *He had a present reward.* "The Lord was with Joseph." The promise made to Abraham was his. The Lord was in all places and in all circumstances his "exceeding great reward." (Gen. xv. 1.) He had the satisfaction of a good conscience, in the thought of duty nobly done. God was with him, and near him, his help and stay. What can be greater than this to a man who can fully realise it? It is true that Joseph was afterwards exalted to greatness and prosperity. But this was not his true reward, which was one altogether spiritual and unseen by the world. In a most sacred and exclusive sense, his reward was with the Most High. God does not pay His people in the coin and honours of this world. 2. *His goodness was made manifest.* That brought him a further reward in the sight of men, and led the way to his advancement and exaltation The first effect was to give him influence over others. He rose in favour with the keeper of the prison. (Verse 21.) "We observe here the real nature of human influence. It is not the influence of rank, but of character. Make all men equal in rank to-day, and to-morrow there will be found those who have acquired influence over the others. These prisoners were all in the same position, but very soon Joseph's character gained him influence. Thus, by the influence of Paul, the jailer at Philippi was converted, Felix trembled before him, and Agrippa was almost persuaded to be a Christian. Let such a man be imprisoned, but he will soon have converted Cæsar's household, for his influence is real."—(*Robertson.*)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 19, 20. A prison is a place of humiliation and shame. The inmates are the actual or suspected perpetrators of evil, whose name is a reproach, whom society casts out. But within these walls of guilt we find a guiltless man. The blameless Joseph is here immured. Without transgression, he is numbered with transgressors. Joseph in custody, reviled for iniquity which he knew not, *foreshadows Jesus, who, without sin, is made sin for us.* He for whom the heaven of heavens is no worthy throne, is clothed for us in prison garb, and tastes for us the prison shame. Hence the Spirit records, "He was taken from prison and from judgment." But *Jesus was arrested by the justice of God.* But wherefore? He lived the Holy Man Jesus. He died the Holy Sufferer. How then could justice touch Him with a jailor's grasp? Because, though no shade of sin was in Him, mountains of sin were upon Him. God transfers the sins of the sinful to His sinless Son. Wondrous is the word, but true as wondrous, "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquities of us all." [*Archdeacon Law: "Christ is All."*]

Verses 21–23. No sooner is Joseph a prisoner, than a guardian of the prisoners. Trust and honour accompany him wheresoever he is: in his father's house, in Potiphar's, in the jail, in the court; still he hath both favour and rule. So long as God is with him, he cannot but shine in spite of men. The walls of that dungeon cannot hide his virtues, the irons cannot hold them. Pharaoh's officers are sent to witness his graces, which he may not come forth to shew.—*(Bp. Hall.)*

A prison keeps not God from His; witness the apostles and martyrs, whose prisons, by God's presence, became palaces; the fiery furnace, a gallery of pleasure; the stocks, a music school. (Acts xvi. 25.)—*(Trapp.)*

Observe the religious tone of this account. We read nothing of Joseph's intellectual superiority, but that "the Lord was with him." The reason of his influence was the God within him. Just so far as a man is Christlike will he have influence.—(*Robertson.*)

In Joseph's condition, nothing is to be seen but death, the loss of his fair fame, and of all his virtues. Now comes Christ with his eyes of grace, and throws light into the grave. "Joseph is to become a Lord, though he had seemingly entered into the prison of hell."—(*Luther.*) Joseph's way is now for a time in the darkness, but this is the very way through which God often leads His people.—(*Lange.*)

Joseph had much yet to do in this world. He was to become "the shepherd and the stone of Israel." He was to be lord of Pharaoh's house, according to the dreams which came to him from heaven; he was to become the father of two powerful tribes in Israel. He could not perish while the promises he had received were yet unaccomplished. All the powers of darkness combined would find themselves unable to put one of God's servants to death whilst any part of his work remained unperformed. What can man do against God? Not only the righteous and the wise, and their works, but the unrighteous, the unwise, and the worst of their works, are in the hands of God—(*Bush.*)

CHAPTER XL.

Critical Notes.—The butler.] "The cupbearer and overseer of the wine—making and storing and serving, an important officer of the king. (2 Kings xviii. 17.) He was now a state prisoner for an offence against Pharaoh."—(*Jacobus.*) **His baker.** "This was another officer in trust of the king's bread and of its making; and his post was one of high trust, because they who had charge of the food of the king might easily poison him."—(*Jacobus.*)—**4. The captain of the guard.]** Potiphar. *Charged Joseph with them.* Not to watch over them, but to wait upon them as a servant. *They continued a season in ward.* Heb. *Days.* It is generally supposed that this represents about a year.—**5. Each man according to the interpretation of his dream.]** This expression is intended to show that the dreams were not empty and unmeaning, but suited to each man's case and capable of a sound interpretation.—**11. I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup.]** "The imagery of the dream is not intended to intimate that

Pharaoh drank only of the fresh juice of the grape. It only expresses by a natural figure the source of wine, and possibly the duty of the chief butler to understand and superintend the whole process of its formation."—(*Murphy.*)—**15. I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews.]** "This phrase is no interpolation. Judea was probably known by this name in Egypt, which Abraham had visited from that land. It may also favour the presumption that the land was inhabited by Hebrews before Canaan took possession of it."—(*Jacobus.*)—**16. Three white baskets on mine head.]** The figures on Egyptian monuments show that was the usual manner in which men carried baskets, while the women carried on the shoulders.—**17. All manner of bake-meats for Pharaoh.]** Heb. "All manner of food of Pharaoh, the work of a baker." The term properly signifies "baked food" in general. *The birds did eat them out of the baskets.* "Even at this day in Egypt kites and hawks seize upon articles of food carried upon the head"—(*Knobel.*)—**19. Lift up thine head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree.]** He was to be beheaded, and his body hung up in disgrace. (Deut. xxi. 22, 23; Josh. x. 26; 2 Sam. iv. 12.)—**20. Lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker.]** "In Ex. xxx. 12, and Num. i. 49, this phrase is used in the sense of *numbering*, and, if so here, then it would mean that in re-counting his officers, Pharaoh *numbered* these—took their poll."—(*Jacobus.*) But some regard this phrase as elliptical, the full expression being *to lift up the head out of prison*, an appropriate one, as such places of confinement were usually under ground.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–23.

LIGHT UPON JOSEPH'S DESTINY.

This chapter discovers signs that Joseph was destined to fill an important place in the history of the kingdom of God. This was now the time of his trial and preparation for his great calling as the ruler of the Egyptians, the deliverer of his nation. Some of the indications of his high destiny are these:—

I. The conviction of his innocence and integrity gains ground. Joseph was, at first, thrown into a dungeon and laid in irons. Now, this severe discipline is relaxed, and he is appointed to a kind of stewardship over the other prisoners. It is highly probable that, by this time, Potiphar was convinced of his innocence, though he detained him in custody for prudential reasons. Joseph was everywhere giving the impression of being a good and holy man. The character of Potiphar's wife could not long be concealed; and as it became more and more known, the belief in Joseph's innocence would gain ground.

II. He discovers signs of his true vocation. 1. *As a saint of God.* Mark how Joseph refers to God in every important crisis of his history. When Pharaoh's two officers lamented that there was no interpreter of their dreams, he said, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" He was always true to his religion. His unmurmuring patience, and calmness in the midst of overwhelming calamities declare what manner of man he is. They speak to us of one who drew from secret springs of consolation, and whose hope was in the Lord his God. Mark his temperateness and forbearance, his calmness and simplicity. He does not speak unkindly of his brethren, he does not even name them, but simply states that he was "stolen out of the land of the Hebrews," and that he had "done nothing" that they should put him "into the dungeon." (Verse 15). Here was the faith and resignation of a saint, whose life was fit to be recorded in the pages of Revelation as an eminent and worthy example to all ages. 2. *As a prophet of God.* As such, he interprets dreams, which are here to be considered as Divine revelations to men, of warning, reproof, and teaching. (Job xxxiii. 14–18.) His own experience had taught him how dreams came from God. It was Joseph's office to reveal to these prisoners the meaning of what God had taught them in their dreams. The true prophet of God interprets the dreams of humanity for a better time. He gives the vague conceptions of sincere, though ill-informed seekers after truth, a form and certainty

He even interprets the groans and pains of creation's agony. (Rom. viii. 19–23.) **3.** *As a kind and just ruler of men.* Joseph was clearly a man who was destined to wield a commanding, and even a regal influence over others. He was fitted for this, doubtless, by his intellectual gifts and general characteristics, but more especially (1) *By his sympathy.* "Wherefore look ye so sadly to-day?" he said to his fellow-prisoners whose dreams suggested the worst forebodings. (Verses 6, 7.) He himself had been in the school of affliction, and he had learned to be tender. Though he had griefs of his own to bear, he felt for others. He cannot be a true ruler of men who has not learned sympathy. (2) *By his uprightness.* He was firm and faithful even when he had to tell unpleasant truths. (Verses 18, 19.) Such are the qualities required in a true ruler of men. (2 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4.)

III. He retains faith and hope in God in the midst of all his adversities. God was with him in the prison. Therefore he does not abandon himself to despair, but still trusts and hopes on. Though Joseph could not fortell his own deliverance, he has confidence that he shall yet be brought out of his house of bondage. (Verse 14). He has confidence that God would, in some way, vindicate him. Pharaoh might have his dreams as well as his servants, and he might be glad to have such an interpreter as Joseph in his court. Or, God might reveal to him the innocence of this prisoner, who was merely the victim of a false accusation. Conscious of his own integrity Joseph, even in his most gloomy moments, never loses faith and hope in God. (Verse 15).

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1–3. *The place where Joseph was bound.* Here was a "wheel within a wheel" (Ezek. i), a sweet providence; that these obnoxious officers should be sent to Joseph's prison.—(*Trapp.*)

The manner in which the Divine Providence quietly and secretly makes the most insignificant things, apparently, the occasion and the cause of wonderful changes, appears very visible in our narrative. It would appear simply fortuitous that Pharaoh should have thrown into prison his two officers on account, perhaps, of some very trifling offence; still more accidental would it appear that Joseph should have charge of them, and that both should have had alarming dreams, and finally how extraordinarily fortuitous that Joseph, on entering, should have observed their depression in their countenances! But all this apparent chance was made a prerequisite, in the course of God's providence, for Joseph's exaltations, and Israel's redemption. "The Lord finds a thousand ways where reason sees not even one."—(*Lange.*)

Verse 4. As Joseph was his slave, and these were State prisoners, he appointed him to wait upon them. It is probable that Joseph's character had been somewhat re-established with him during his residence in the prison.—(*Murphy.*)

The occurrences of the heathen world, the affairs of courts, their crimes, cabals, intrigues, are all under the divine control. Prisons, too, with their dark chambers, dungeons, sorrows, secrets, are under the control of God. At all times they have enclosed not only criminals, but the innocent—oftentimes the best and most pious of men. Christ says: *I was in prison, and ye came unto me*; and He speaks thus, not of faithful martyrs only; even among the guilty there is a spark of Christ's kinsmanship, *i.e.*. belonging to Him.—(*Lange.*)

Verses 5–7. It appears from hence that Joseph was not a hard-hearted overseer: unlike many petty officers, whose overbearing conduct towards their inferiors is the most intolerable, he sympathises with the sorrowful, and makes free with them. The fear of God produces tenderness of heart and compassion towards men, especially to the poor and the afflicted.—*(Fuller.)*

Joseph had suffered like them, and therefore he understood their feelings. With the value of suffering we are familiar; but we do not often remember that suffering is absolutely necessary to capacitate us for sympathy. Would you be a Barnabas, a son of consolation? Brother men, you may; but then you must pay the cost, the education of the soul by suffering.—(*Robertson.*)

Verses 8–11. Supernatural dreams seem usually to have left an impression upon the minds of their recipients amounting to a violent agitation. (Dan. ii. 1.) So also the dream of Pilate's wife. (Matt. xxvii. 19). We see from this what access God has to the spirits of men, and how easily He can arm their imaginations against their own peace. He can at pleasure send a secret panic into our souls, and scare us as he did Job with dreams and visions, and even fill our days and nights with terror by presages and forebodings of uncertain evils.—*(Bush.)*

But what kind of interpreters did these men wish for? Such, no doubt, as Pharaoh on his having dreamed, called for, namely the magicians, and the wise men of Egypt; and because they had no hopes of obtaining them in their present situation, therefore were they sad. Here lies the force of Joseph's question: "Do not interpretations belong to God?" Which was a reproof to them for looking to their magicians instead of Him; hence also he offered himself as the servant of God to be their interpreter.—(*Fuller.*)

The servants of God may be bound in a prison; but the word of God is not bound. (2 Tim. ii. 9.)

Divine words and warnings can only be interpreted by those who are taught of God.

Observe the characteristic nature of those dreams. In every case the dream betrayed the man. The butler dreamed of three great vine branches and ripe grapes, the baker of three baskets of baked meats, and Joseph, in one of his own dreams, dreamt of agriculture, the calling to which he had been accustomed. The application that we make of this is, that our spontaneous thoughts betray our character. The trivial man dreams of trivial things, but if the vision that is presented is to a man like St. Paul, he is lifted up to the third heaven, and hears unutterable things which it is not lawful to speak. The dream itself is evidence of a man of deep feeling and imagination, and of a life of spirituality. When Peter too dreamed of the sheet let down from heaven and was told to kill and eat, he says: "Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything common or unclean." The answer speaks of a long life of obedience, for even in his dream he could not be induced to transgress the written law of God. In our hours of contemplation the soul is surrounded by its own creations, and if they be of a holy character, the man lives as in the presence of God and angels, but if, on the contrary, instead of imagination spiritualized and purified, the spirit is but sensualized, the man has then made for himself his own hell.—(*Robertson.*)

Verses 12, 13. The general interpretation given by Joseph to the dream is quite obvious. He would naturally infer that the man was very desirous of being restored to his office, and he would be very apt to say that such was the drift of the dream; still it would have been a mere guess. Nothing short of Divine inspiration could have assured Joseph that the dream was to be realized. But there was another circumstance which left no room to doubt whether the interpretation was only a happy conjecture or a Divine discovery. The *time* was specified; the three branches were three days.

What human sagacity could have divined that the branches of the vine had any reference to time? or, if they had, whether three days, or three months, or three years were meant. It was wisely ordered that one part of the dream should require a divinely inspired interpreter. It was God's design to assure the butler that Joseph obtained his wisdom, not from man, but by revelation from above.—(*Bush.*)

Joseph foresaw the time of the butler's deliverance, but he knew not the time of his own. In good hope he was, that now he should have been delivered, upon the restoration of the butler, and his intercession for him; but he was fain to stay two years longer; "till the time that God's word came: the word of the Lord tried him" (Ps. cv. 19); by trying, as in a fire, his faith and patience in afflictions. —(*Trapp.*)

Verse 14. He very naturally throws in a request on behalf of himself. There is no symptom of impatience in this: but patience itself may consist with the use of all lawful means to obtain deliverance. The terms in which this request are made are modest, and exceedingly impressive. He might have asked for a place under the chief butler, or some other post of honour or profit: but he requests only to be delivered from *this house.* He might have reminded him how much he owed to his sympathetic and kind treatment; but he left these things to speak for themselves. In pleading the exalted station in which the chief butler was about to be reinstated, he gently intimates the obligations which people in prosperous circumstances are under, to think of the poor and afflicted; and Christians may still farther improve the principle, not to be unmindful of such cases in their approaches to the King of Kings. This plea may also direct us to make use of His name and interest, who is exalted at the right hand of the Majesty on high. It was on this principle that the dying thief presented his petition—*Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!* a petition which the Lord of Glory did neither refuse nor forget: and still He liveth to make intercession for us. —(*Fuller.*)

The Jews charge that Joseph in this request demanded pay for his interpretation, and allege that, on this account, he had to remain in prison two years longer. There is, however, no ground for such an imputation. But though he had the assurance of the Divine presence, and that God would deliver him from the prison, he had, nevertheless, a natural longing for liberty. Besides, he did not ask for anything unfair of the butler. (1 Cor. vii. 21.)—(*Lange.*)

1. The *principle* of this request. It is this, that those who have themselves suffered are able to enter into the feelings of others who are called upon likewise to suffer. Men are prepared for the ministry of help and consolation by suffering. 2. *Illustrations* of this principle. (1.) The children of Israel were required to show kindness to the stranger, because they understood the feelings of a stranger when they were strangers in the land of Egypt. (2.) Joseph might assume that the butler knew the feelings of a prisoner, and that he would be ready to help his poor companion in bonds. (3.) It was thus that the Son of Man was trained to be the Captain of our salvation. (Heb. ii. 10).

Verse 15. Hence he was of a superior class to that from which slaves were commonly taken.—(*Jacobus.*)

In this profession of innocence, notice his calmness and simplicity. There are no invectives against his brethren, or against Potiphar and his wife; he merely states that he was innocent. Calm assertion is *generally* a proof of innocence. When you hear men cursing and swearing, like Peter, in order to asseverate their innocence, you may feel assured that there is guilt. It has been well observed, that this calmness of speech in the Gospel history is an evidence of its truth. Had it been a fiction, how would the writer have enlarged on the injustice of the Jews, and the difference in the characters of the blessed Redeemer and Barabbas! whereas the Evangelist makes no comment, but simply and calmly states the fact—"Now Barabbas was a robber."—(*Robertson.*)

Verses 16–19. Observe in Joseph's conduct the integrity of his truthfulness. It was a pleasant thing to tell the chief butler that he should be reinstated in his office; but it was not pleasant to tell the baker that after three days he should be hanged. Yet Joseph could not shrink; having once accepted the office of interpreter, he was obliged to fulfil it faithfully. This truthfulness was a matter of habit as well as of principle with Joseph. There are many men who would not tell a direct falsehood, and yet their ordinary habit is by no means strictly veracious. With no distinct intention of doing wrong, they embellish and exaggerate. Therefore, let us get the habit of accuracy; and when a thing is simply *unpleasant*, let us not say that it is *dreadful.* These are merely habits, but by degrees they break down the truth of the Christian character.—(*Robertson.*)

And Joseph answered, etc. It is probable he used some preface to this sad destiny he reads him; as Philo brings him in saying, I would thou hadst not dreamt such a dream: or as Daniel prefaced to Nebuchadnezzar; "My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation to thine enemies." (Dan. iv. 19.) If ministers, God's interpreters, must be mannerly in the form, yet in the matter of their message they must be resolute. Not only toothsome, but bitter truths must be told, however they be taken. (Gal. i. 10.)—(*Trapp*).

In Hebrew, "to lift up the head," is a play upon words. It means to restore to honour and dignity, or to hang upon the gallows, or decapitation (taking off the head), or crucifixion (lifting up upon the cross).—(*Lange.*)

Verses 20–22. If both these men's dreams had portended pardon, the interpretation given by Joseph might have been considered merely as a lucky conjecture. It was reasonable to suppose that on the approaching festivity of the king's birthday he would signalize his clemency by some act of grace to offenders; but who could have foreseen that he would make one of his servants to feel the severity of his displeasure on the happy day, whilst he pardoned the other; or that he would execute his displeasure by hanging his dead body on a tree, and exposing it as a prey to the fowls of heaven? Every circumstance tended to establish the credit of Joseph as a man that enjoyed intercourse with heaven. In like manner the perfect accomplishment of the various prophecies of the Scripture leaves us without excuse if we withhold our belief of its Divine inspiration.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 23. The butler's ingratitude. 1. It was blameworthy, though he had received no personal favour from Joseph. He knew that this young man was unjustly enslaved and imprisoned. It was an act of inhumanity to forget him. 2. It is recorded as an example of warning for all time. The name of this chief butler is condemned to perpetual dishonour; and, while the world lasts, will be held up as a warning to men not to be too confiding in the companions of their adversity when these are raised to positions where they can help them. High station often changes the manners, and makes men too proud to notice their humble friends and to remember the kindnesses they received from them in simpler days. 3. It reminds us that God will notice and visit all ingratitude. There is a Book of God which contains the record of every individual life. And when that Book is opened, confusion will cover the faces of all who have been guilty of ingratitude to God or man.

Alas, what a selfish creature is man! How strangely does prosperity intoxicate and drown the mind. How common it is for people in high life to forget the poor, even those to whom they have been under the greatest obligations. Well, be it so; Joseph's God did not forget him: and we, amidst all the neglects of creatures, may take comfort in this—Jesus does not neglect us. Though exalted far above all principalities and powers, He is not elated with His glory, so as to forget His poor suffering people upon earth. Only let us be concerned not to forget Him. He who needs not our esteem, as we do His, hath yet in love condescended to ask us to do thus and thus *in remembrance of Him!*—(*Fuller.*)

It was Joseph's single ray of hope in the prison—that which lighted him to freedom—that he could commend himself to the intercession of the chief butler. When this went out, according to every probable view, there seemed nothing else for him than to pine away his whole life in prison; and yet the fulfilment of the dreams of the court officers might have strengthened him in the hope of the fulfilment of his own dreams in his native home.—(*Lange*).

Our ingratitude towards the New Testament, Joseph, in forgetting all that He has done for us in our bondage, will fill us with confusion at the great day!—(*Jacobus*).

CHAPTER XLI.

Critical Notes.—1. The river.] So the Nile is called, by way of emphasis in the Old Testament when the scene is laid in Egypt. 6. **Blasted with the east wind.]** "The east wind here is the *Chamsia* from the south-east or desert of Arabia. It withers every green thing if it continues to blow any time."—(*Jacobus.*)—8. **The magicians.]** "*The scribes*, the hieroglyphs, who belonged to the priestly caste, and whose primary business was to make hieroglyphic and other inscriptions; while they were wont to consult the stars, interpret dreams, practise soothsaying, and pursue the other occult arts. *The wise men. The sages*, whose chief business was the cultivation of the various arts above mentioned, while the engraving or inscribing department strictly belonged to the hieroglyphs or scribes."—(*Murphy*)—14. **He shaved himself and changed his raiment.]** "The fact of Joseph having shaved himself is in striking accord with the Egyptian custom, which was to let the beard and hair grow in mourning only—otherwise most scrupulously shaving; whereas the Hebrews cultivated the hair and beard and shaved in token of mourning (see 2 Sam. x. 4, 5; Isa. xv. 2; Jer. xvi. 6; xli. 5; Amos viii. 10). He changed his raiment, from the ordinary habit of the prison to that of ordinary life or even of festal rejoicing. The fact of his having it in his power to do so shews that he was not treated as ordinary prisoners are." (See Chap. xxxix. 22, 23.)—(*Alford.*)—16. **God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.]** Heb. "God will answer as to the peace (or welfare) of Pharaoh." The meaning is, that God will give an answer such as shall prove to be for the welfare of Pharaoh.—32. **The dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice.]** This denotes the certainty and nearness of the event. (1 Kings xi. 9; Job xxxiii. 14; Ps. lxii. 11.)—34. **Take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt.]** Lay on a tax of a fifth of the produce. "The exaction of a fifth or two tithes, during the period of plenty, may have been an extraordinary measure, which the absolute power of the monarch enabled him to enforce for the public safety."—(*Murphy.*) "The Egyptians were accustomed to a tax of a *tenth* in ordinary years, for the public granaries. The extra crop would enable them easily to double the tax or rent."—(*Jacobus.*)—40. **According unto thy word shall all my people be ruled.]** "Some of the Hebraists (*e.g.*, Gesenius, Knobel) render it '*on thy mouth shall my people kiss*,' and interpret it of the kiss of homage. But most of the others believe the meaning to be as in the text, objecting that the kiss of homage was reserved for princes."—(*Alford.*)—42. **His ring.]** Joseph is appointed grand vizier by giving him the signet ring of the monarch. (Esther iii. 10; viii. 2.) **Vestures of fine linen.]** The priesthood, which was the foremost caste of Egypt, wore only linen and cotton garments; and no man was allowed to enter a temple in a woollen garment (Herod. ii. 37, 81). **A gold chain about his neck.]** The Egyptian monuments and wall-paintings show that the gold chain was worn by persons of distinction. It was especially the badge of office worn by the judge and the prime minister. This was also the custom in Persia and Babylonia. (Dan. v. 7.)—43. **And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had.]** The second state chariot in the public procession. Herodotus tells us that Egypt was noted for chariots both for peaceful and for warlike purposes. (Herod. ii. 108.) ***They cried before him.*** The heralds, whose office it was to prepare the way for the royal procession. *Bow the knee.* "Some render the word, '*Father, of the king*,' others, *Bow the knee.* But it is rather an Egyptian word and not Hebrew, and means, Cast yourselves down—do homage."—(*Jacobus*.)—45. **Zaphnath-paaneah.**] His elevation is denoted by a new name (Gen. xvii. 5; Dan. i. 7), which means, Preserver of life. Jerome interpreted it in the Vulgate *Salvator Mundi* (Saviour of the world). *Poti-pherah.* "He who is of the sun." There was a temple of the sun at On, which was the popular name for Heliopolis, meaning *the house or city of the sun.* It is called Aven (Ex. xxx. 17), and Bethshemesh (Jer. xliii. 13).—47. **By handfuls.**] "Not in single stalks or grains, but in handfuls compared with the former yield."—(*Murphy*)—51. **Manasseh.**] That is, *causing to forget.*—52. **Ephraim.**] That is, *fruitful.*—54. **In all lands.**] "All the lands adjacent to Egypt, such as Arabia and Palestine. The word all in popular discourse is taken in a relative sense, to be ascertained by the context. We are not aware that this famine was felt beyond the distance of Hebron."—(*Murphy.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-8.

PHARAOH'S DREAM.

Pharaoh's dream illustrates the following principles and truths :—

I. That apparently insignificant events may often grow into an important part of the world's history. Who would have thought, before the event, that this strange dream would have had any important bearing on the history of the world! Yet *we* know that it stands connected with the highest interests of the human race. It led to the preservation of Israel and of Egypt. It educated the people of God for the peculiar position which they were to occupy in the history of redemption. The links of the chain were these : It was not God's will that Pharaoh should understand his dream till it was explained to him by a heaven-taught interpreter. Had the meaning of it been so clear that the wise men of Egypt could not have failed to interpret it, the very purpose for which the dream was granted would have been defeated. Then Joseph comes to the front, and is found to be the man for the times. Both the Egyptians and the Israelites by his means are preserved. A position and persistent endurance are thus given to that family out of which redemption is to spring.

II. That God chooses the instruments of revelation according to His own good pleasure. Israel, of old, was the chosen home of revelation, yet God sometimes made known His will to men of other nations. Pharaoh's dream was certainly prophetic, and there is no question but that dreams like this have been vouchsafed to many outside the chosen family. God gave this dream to a heathen man. Even the possession of the gift of prophecy does not of necessity imply superior religious knowledge, or the holiness of the prophet's character. Balaam had the gift of prophecy, and spake the words of God, as well as Isaiah. There may be gifts where there are few or no graces. This heathen king is made to serve God by becoming an unconscious and unwilling instrument of His will. (Prov. xxi. 1.) Such were the high priests in the days of our Lord.

III. That God can suddenly arrest the attention of those who are the farthest removed from every earthly fear. Pharaoh was absolute lord of the nation, yet "his spirit was troubled." The common people were superstitious in regard to dreams and omens, but his princely education would surely place him above the credulous fears of the vulgar! Yet, God suddenly arrests the attention of this man by a remarkable dream. Pharaoh could afford to laugh at vulgar prejudices and superstitions, but now strange misgivings and terrors from, he knows not whence, arise within him. Thus there is a power above us which can tame the greatest of earth's sons. Think of the courage and daring of Nebuchadnezzar, yet God could make him afraid like a grasshopper by the visions which he had upon his bed.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Two years of imprisonment will appear a much longer time to one who has not learned to bear the evils of life with an uncommon degree of fortitude. In fact, it is not so much the intenseness of our trials as the duration of them that is the greatest test of our patience. Even those who have been taught of God are strongly tempted under long-continued afflictions to weary of the Lord's correction. —(*Bush.*)

Joseph's exaltation was accomplished by his innocent sufferings and his good conduct. (Phil. ii. 6.) Carried out by God's grace and wisdom as a divine miracle in His special providence. *Its principal object*, the preservation of Israel and of many nations. Its further object, Israel's education in Egypt. Its imperishable aim, the glory of God, and the education of the people of God by means of the fundamental principle: through humiliation to exaltation. *Its typical significance.* The seal of Israel's guidance in Egypt, of the guidance of all the faithful, of the guidance of Christ as the model of our divine instruction.—(*Lange.*)

Whom God means to raise to honour, He suffers to remain, for a time, under the cross.—(*Cramer.*)

Verse 2. The cow is a very significant emblem of fruitful nature among the Egyptians, the hieroglyphic symbol of the earth and of agriculture; and the form in which Isis, the goddess of the earth, was adored.—(*Murphy.*)

Verses 3, 4. These, by their leanness, portended drought and dearth, though they came up out of Nilus also. This river, when it overflows unto twelve cubits' height only, causeth famine; when to thirteen, scarcity; when to fourteen, cheerfulness; when to fifteen, affluence; when to sixteen, abundance, as Pliny tells us.—(*Trapp.*)

Verses 5–7. The number seven represents the religious element in the case. The thin ears are said to be blasted with the east wind, which, when directly east, occurs in Egypt as seldom as the directly west. The south-east wind, however, is frequent. —(*Hengstenberg.*)

Verse 8. The wisdom that God reveals excels that of the world; therefore the latter is to be confounded by the former. (Rom. viii. 28.)—(*Starke.*)

Unlike the wise men of Babylon, whom Nebuchadnezzar summoned to his aid on a like occasion, and who confidently promised to unravel the king's dream as soon as it was made known to them, the magicians of Egypt, when Pharaoh's dream was rehearsed in their ears, did not pretend to know the meaning of it. All their combined wisdom durst not pretend to penetrate the secrets of Divine Providence to which it referred. God, by His overruling influence upon their minds, constrained them to acknowledge their ignorance.—(*Bush.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 9-16

JOSEPH SUMMONED INTO PHARAOH'S PRESENCE.

Consider—

I. **His long waiting for notice and deliverance.** For two long and weary years was Joseph lingering in that prison. He had to endure that trial of hope deferred that maketh the heart sick. The purest and wisest man in the land was shut up in a prison for two of the best years of his life. This seems to us a sad waste of power. But the religious mind will see in it the wisdom of God. 1. *In regard to the education of character.* The delays of Providence (as they seem to us) are part of our spiritual education. All this time, Joseph was learning God's lessons. We require the teaching, not only of precepts, but also of events and trials. Joseph had faults of character to correct, much to unlearn; notoriously the spirit of censoriousness and pride. And two years were not too short a time to get the lessons of life's true wisdom by heart. The wisdom of God in this painful chapter of Joseph's history is also seen—2. *In its adaptation to the circumstances of the individual.* During these two years of Joseph's hard trial, events were not ripe for his deliverance. Divine Providence is not obliged to use forcing processes to precipitate events. Had Joseph been released before, he might have returned to his father's house, or re-entered the service of Potiphar; and then in the natural course of things, how could Israel and Egypt have been preserved! The wisdom of God is yet further seen—3. *In its elevation above all human infirmities.* God is not in haste to bring His work to its appointed end. Providence works by, what appear to us to be, slow methods. Short-sighted man must seize upon every tempting opportunity, but infinite wisdom knows no such infirmity. God allows those slowly to ripen whom He destines for a great work. Illustrated by the history of John the Baptist, who spent a life-time in the wilderness to prepare him for a brief ministry of a few months; and also by God's own Son, who did not begin to preach the Gospel of the kingdom till He was thirty years old.

II. The manifest hand of God in it. Without doubt we have here the agency of man, and results which may be traced to the natural course of events. The chief butler suddenly remembers how Joseph interpreted *his* dream, and also that of his fellow-prisoner; and how remarkably the interpretation had been fulfilled. He mentions this extraordinary person to Pharaoh, who naturally sends for Joseph as the very man he wanted in his great perplexity. But we cannot here fail to see the manifest hand of God at work. It was God who sent this dream to Pharaoh, and it must follow that the interpreter of it must be divinely instructed. It was wisely ordered that Joseph should be under no obligation to Pharaoh for his deliverance. It is *for his own sake* that Pharaoh sends for Joseph. The chief butler was suffered to forget his friend, the prophet of his deliverance, and was forced to remember him only by circumstances. To neither of them was Joseph indebted. Thus it was God's design that the chosen family should be under obligations to none. Their calling was to impart blessings to mankind, and not to receive.

III. His piety throughout the interview. 1. *His simplicity of character.* He makes no long speech. He does not use the opportunity to glorify himself, or to plead for liberty and reward. His manner was dignified and respectful, yet marked by great openness and simplicity of character. Joseph is the same in the palace or in the prison. 2. *His humility.* He indulged in no spirit of boasting, though this compliment from the king would have tempted weaker men to be vain and proud. (Verse 15.) Joseph never forgot his character as a witness for God. 3. *His calmness.* He was conscious of God's presence and of his own integrity, so he could afford to be calm before the rulers of this world. 4. *His kindly consideration for others.* Pharaoh might have reason for the worst fears when he heard of the interpretation of the baker's dream. Though a king he was not exempt from the common evils of human nature; nor from death—the chief calamity. But Joseph hastens to remove all fear of an unfavourable interpretation from his mind, by assuring him that the future had in it nothing but what would make for the peace of Pharaoh. Thus Joseph combined faithfulness to God's cause with kindness and consideration for man.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 9. He ought, indeed, to have remembered his fault against Joseph and against God, whose goodness he concealed when he ought to have published it. But this fault seems to have made little or no impression on his mind. His former faults he acknowledged in deference to the king.—(*Bush.*)

A right courtier's speech! He so relates the history of his imprisonment that he takes all the blame thereof to himself; gives Pharaoh the full commendation of his justice and clemency. (*Trapp.*)

There is a morbid feeling which delights in railing against human nature; but there is a wiser lesson to be gained from this story than merely speaking of the butler's ungratefulness. Consider, first, the suspense in which he was respecting his trial, and then the onerous duties that he had to perform. Then remember, too, that what Joseph did for him after all was not so much, it was merely the interpretation of his dream. The lesson that we draw from this is: In this world we do too little and we expect too much. We bless a poor man by giving to him, and we expect that we have made him our debtor for life. You fancy that the world has forgotten you. Reason with yourselves. For this world from which you expect so much, what have you done? And if you find that you have done little and received much, what marvel is it that you receive no more? The only marvel is that we have received so much.—(*Robertson.*)

The memory of the chief butler. Forgetfulness of the small—a sharp remembrance in the service of the great. —(*Lange*).

Verses 10–13. He now recites the circumstances in which he became acquainted with Joseph, and his wonderful success in interpreting dreams. It is not so much to do Joseph a favour that he commends him as it is to raise himself in Pharaoh's esteem. —(*Jacobus.*)

And he interpreted to us our dreams. And well you requited him! But better late than never, though a ready dispatch doubleth the benefit. Howbeit God had an overruling hand in it, for Joseph's greatest good. He turneth the world's ingratitude to the salvation of His servants.—(*Trapp.*)

Joseph as opposed to the Egyptian interpreters of dreams, Moses as opposed to the Egyptian sorcerers, Christ as opposed to the Scribes and Pharisees, Paul as opposed to heresies, etc., or, in other words, the contrast between Divine wisdom and the wisdom of this world—a contrast that pervades all history.—(*Lange.*)

Verse 14. The word of the Lord had sufficiently tried Joseph. The mystery of Providence concerning him was now to be cleared up.

It is said of Mephibosheth, 2 Sam. xix. 24, that he had not washed his clothes, nor washed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, from the time that David left Jerusalem, because of Absolom, till he returned again in peace to his father's house. By like signs Joseph expressed his humiliation under those afflictions which Divine Providence had laid upon him. But now, when called before the king, he laid aside his mourning apparel, that he might appear with decency and due respect in the royal presence. Doubtless when he exchanged his prison garments for such as are worn in king's palaces, his heart rejoiced less in the change of his circumstances, than in the favour of God, who had "put off his sackcloth, and girded him with gladness, to the end that his glory might sing praise to the Lord."—(*Bush.*)

Verse 15. Pharaoh desires to learn from Joseph. The highest in station must be ready to learn from the lowest. Wisdom is not to be despised because it has a humble dwelling in some obscure child of man.

A Christian is not to judge the gifts according to the person, but the persons according to the gifts.—*(Cramer.)*

Joseph had now an opportunity, which he did not suffer to pass unimproved, of shewing forth the superiority of his own God to the gods of Egypt, and of pouring contempt upon the boasted wisdom of the magicians.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 16. No man is fit to declare the counsels of God who is not deeply sensible of his own unfitness without receiving light and help from above. —(*Bush.*)

Observe the graceful way in which Joseph refers all to God. He says, "It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." Observe also his calmness; this was produced by the consciousness of God's presence. He was not there to consider what men would think of him; he felt that the gift was from God. It is only this feeling that can effectually crush the flutterings of vanity. "What hast thou," says the Apostle, "that thou didst not receive?"—(*Robertson.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17–32.

JOSEPH AS A PROPHET.

In interpreting Pharaoh's dream, Joseph shows himself a true prophet of the Lord. He has all the marks of those who are called to reveal the Divine mind to man.

I. Boldness. The true prophet has no fear of man. He speaks the word which God hath given him, regardless of consequences. He is ready to reprove even kings—to utter truths, however unwelcome. It required some courage to enter upon the perilous task of announcing to this Egyptian despot a famine of seven years. But Joseph had all the boldness of a man who felt that he was inspired by God.

II. Directness. Joseph spoke out at once, without any hesitation. There was no shuffling to gain time; no muttering—no incantations, after the manner of heathen oracles and prophets. This simple and clear directness is the special characteristic of Holy Scriptures; and by which they are distinguished from the literature of the world, which upon the deepest and most concerning questions never reaches a stable conclusion.

III. Positiveness. Joseph's interpretation was throughout explicit and clear There are no signs of doubt or misgiving. This Divine certainty is the common mark of all God's prophets.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 17. Here begins Joseph's rise. Being in prison, he struck not fire, though he had a good brain; but waited till it came down from heaven to him, first in the butler's dream, and now in Pharaoh's.—(*Trapp.*)

It was happy for Pharaoh and for Egypt that the magicians confessed their incapacity to interpret this dream. Had they pretended to give some meaning to it out of the imagination of their own hearts, it is probable that he would have rested satisfied with it, and sought no further. Consequently when the seven years of plenty came, the abundance might have been spent in dissipation, and no provision made against the long and terrible famine. But when he was convinced that the mind of God was not with the magicians, he was forced to seek for light where he could find it.—(*Bush.*)

Verses 18–24. Even to the heathen and to infidels, God sometimes reveals great and secret things, to the end that it may become known how His Divine care and Providence may be traced everywhere within and without the Church.—(*Starke.*)

Verses 25-32. Joseph no doubt felt happy in seizing this opportunity to speak of his own God, the Ruler of the world, to Pharaoh, and particularly to proclaim His providence and foreknowledge. He knew that events would soon confirm his words, and that Pharaoh's mind was already prepared to receive it.—(*Bush.*)

Important truths are repeated in the Scriptures. God speaks once, yea, twice to man.

Joseph marks his God-consciousness more distinctly before Pharaoh, by saying *Ha-Elohim*, thus making *Elohim* concrete by means of the article.—(*Lange.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 33-36.

JOSEPH AS THE ADVISER OF PHARAOH.

The occasion was important and critical, but Joseph was quite himself. The marked and well-known features of his character are manifest.

I. His presence of mind. Joseph was not one of those men whose dull faculties move slowly and require a long time to rouse them to exertion. He was a man of energy and spirit, and of ready resource. He proved himself equal to this present situation by fearlessly offering advice which was at once rational and practical.

II. The kindness and openness of his nature. He wanted to preserve the country from a great calamity; and in all the simplicity of his heart offers this sound advice, not as one who merely wished to be officious, but as one who could sympathise with the sorrows of others.

III. His self-command. He is not embarrassed nor over-awed by the situation in which he suddenly found himself placed. He allows himself to think soberly.

IV. His practical good sense. He does not show any fanaticism by taking refuge in a presumptuous dependence upon Providence, but imparts counsels worthy of a great statesman who has the interests of his country at heart. He counsels that excellent prudence which provides for the future. Pharoah was to lay up, in the time of plenty, for the time of famine. Joseph's practical good sense is especially seen when he advises his king to choose *a man for the times.* In great crisis of human affairs one wise and strong director is needed. It is those great men who have proved their sufficiency for the times that make history. The qualities of such a man are—1. *That he should be discreet.* He should be intelligent and capable of understanding the signs of the times. He must be able to distinguish things that differ, to resist the temptation of what is merely plausible, to look fairly on every side of him, and to point out the more excellent way. 2. *That he should be wise.* He should be a prudent man, one who was capable of using his knowledge rightly, that prudence which foreseeth the evil and hides itself in the impregnable fortress of wisdom. He should be a man of action as well as of thought and of knowledge. Such a man was Joseph, a man truly raised up for the times. He had no interested designs. He did not, like Haman, give advice merely to recommend himself. His only aim was the good of his country and the glory of his God.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 33–36. The good counsel which Joseph adds to the interpretation of the dream makes the answer of God an answer of peace, and not of evil. It may be justly questioned whether Pharaoh would have made any good improvement of his dreams if Joseph had merely interpreted them, without speaking of the use that ought to be made of the Divine discovery. God reveals nothing before it happens without some good end in view. The intention of prophecies concerning judgments to come is to excite those threatened with them to take proper measures for averting them. The grand purpose of God in Pharaoh's dreams was not to gratify a vain curiosity about the future, but to procure deliverance and honour to Joseph, and to preserve Egypt, and the family of Jacob, and the countries around from destruction.—*(Bush.)*

One practical inference is to be drawn from this history, the same that was taught by our Master in the parable of the unjust steward. He commended the unjust steward because he had done wisely; he was wiser in his generation than the children of light; he had used his opportunity. Our Redeemer tells us that where he gained we fail; we have our advantages, and we, the children of light neglect to use them for the future. The same lesson is taught by Joseph's history. To us, the years in which we are living are those of plenty, abundance of spiritual instruction; but the years of dearth will come. Blessed is the man who shall use the present well. Blessed is he who makes use of the present opportunity, who is using the present in acquiring spiritual strength. Blessed is he who is laying up for himself, while on earth, a treasure in the heavens which shall never fail.—*(Robertson.)*

The counsel of Joseph stands good both in regard to earthly and heavenly things; and is all the more necessary, for men generally make a bad use of abundance.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 37–45.

PHARAOH ACCEPTS JOSEPH'S ADVICE.

In which he shows:—

I. His wisdom and prudence. 1. *In acting upon the best evidence he had.* The interpretation seemed to be clear and just; the course advised, reasonable. Pharaoh did not wait for a demonstrated certainty; but seeing that the next step before him was clear, he took that step. This is just our position with regard to the will and and purpose of God as revealed in the Bible. The Bible speaks to us of many things which now we cannot prove. We have to believe much upon evidence which our reason might persuade us is inconclusive, but which faith teaches us to receive. We are told of a time in which we may lay up for the future, and it is our wisdom to make that provision while we have opportunity. The message of Joseph carried with it the conviction of truth. So does the message of the Bible. To the Christian, faith is the verification of the invisible. 2. *In choosing a fit man for the crisis.* Everything now pointed to Joseph as the right man for the times. Pharaoh appeals to his courtiers as to whether it was not the wisest course to appoint Joseph at the head of affairs. They make no answer; as they were, perhaps, a little jealous of this foreigner, like as the Babylonish nobles were towards Daniel. And Pharaoh also shows his prudence *in removing all social disabilities from this foreigner.* He asserts his own authority as the fountain of rank. (Verses 40, 41, 44.) He invests Joseph with the symbols and array of dignity and honour. (Verses 42, 43.) He naturalizes him by giving him *a new name*, and so removing Egyptian prejudices. Joseph was fitly named, "the salvation of life," for he was in very deed the preserver of life, the salvation of his country. This new name would tend to exalt the character of Joseph in the eyes of all the people. Joseph's social standing was further assured *by his marriage with the daughter of the priest of On.* (Verse 45.) The priests of Egypt were the highest class in the State, the landed aristocracy. They attended, and even controlled the kings. Besides, Joseph's father-in-law was the chief priest of On—the royal city. By marriage into this high caste Joseph's social position was at once determined and secured.

II. His piety. When we speak of Pharaoh's piety, it is not intended that it should be reckoned by our modern Christian standard. God accepts according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not. Surely it was a heaven-taught instinct which led Pharaoh to recognise the spirit of God in Joseph. He believed that he had before him a man who enjoyed intercourse with God, and who was inspired by Him. (Verses 38, 39.) And his conviction of the Godlike character and calling of Joseph was stronger than the tyranny of any feelings bred by a sense of propriety, or by the stern law of custom. It required strong principle to overcome national prejudices and the rigour of social order. But Pharaoh braved all consequences, so convinced was he that Joseph was a man taught of God. Even this promoting of Joseph's alliance with the daughter of the priest of the sun does not forbid us to believe in the piety of Pharaoh. For in all this idolatry there can be discovered some lingering traces of the one true God. The world was then too young to have arrived at a rigid and sharply-defined distinction between polytheism and monotheism. The Pharaoh of Abraham's day feels the power of Him whose name is Jehovah. (Gen. xii. 7.) Abimelech acknowledges the God of Abraham and Isaac. (Gen. xx. 3–7; xxi. 22, 23; xxvi, 28, 29.) Joseph had mentioned the true God to Pharaoh, and this was not without its blessed effect. Joseph was permitted to worship the God of his fathers, and we have reason to believe that Pharaoh, to some extent, entered into the spirit of that worship. "In the account of Pharaoh's dealings with Joseph, the Egyptian monarch appears to have acted with the strictest honesty and integrity, and as a reward he was supernaturally apprised of the famine which should come upon his land. When he exclaims concerning Joseph, 'Can we find such a man as this, a man in whom the spirit of the Lord is?' he seems to have been actuated by a spirit of real piety. Hard it would be, indeed, to question the salvability of a monarch who could come to this pious resolution, which is recorded in Verse 39. There are frequent allusions in Scripture to the tenderness with which God treated the heathen nations who beheld His judgments on the Israelites. (Ezek. xx. 5-10.) This tenderness towards the Egyptians and other heathen nations, can be explained only on a desire not to aggravate their sins, and this affords us no slight ground for our general argument. "In whose sight I made myself known unto them (the heathen), by bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt." (Verse 9.) "I will be sanctified in you before the heathen." (Verse 41.)—(*Grinfield "On the Salvability of the Heathen."*)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 37, 38. *Can we find such a man as this?* Hence some collect that Joseph preached many more things to the king, of God, His power, providence, goodness, etc., than are here recorded; and was therefore so admired, and advanced to the office of teaching his senators wisdom. "To bind his princes to his soul, and make wise his elders" (Ps. cv. 22), as the original hath it.—*Trapp.*

It is a sign of great wisdom to be able to give the best counsel; but it is a sign of wisdom also to be able to appreciate such counsel when it is given, and to be ready to follow it. Pharaoh was sensible that a divine person or a divine influence had enlightened Joseph's mind and given him this extraordinary knowledge. His proposal therefore, to honour Joseph was a virtual honouring of the God whom he served. His affairs, he was convinced, would be most likely to prosper in the hands of a a man whom God loved and taught.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 39. The king's conclusion shows how greatly Egypt esteemed the higher knowledge; since it confirms the opinion which made this nation so renowned for wisdom among the ancients.—(*Lange.*)

Joseph honoured God before Pharaoh, and God honoured Joseph in the sight of Pharaoh. A little time ago he was traduced as one of the vilest of men; now the king honours him as a man of incomparable worth. We may learn from this not to be greatly dejected by reproach, nor puffed up by praise. The best of men have passed through good report and evil report.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 40. They that bestow places of charge in Church or commonwealth upon undeserving persons, for by-respects, shall have Pharaoh to rise up in judgment against them.—(*Trapp.*)

Verses 41–45. Behold one hour hath changed his fetters into a chain of gold, his rags into fine linen, his stocks into a chariot, his jail into a palace; Potiphar's captive into his master's lord; the noise of his chains into Abrech. He, whose chastity refused the wanton allurements of the wife of Potiphar, had now given him to his wife the daughter of Potipherah. Humility goes before honour; serving and suffering are the best tutors to government. How well are God's children paid for their patience! How happy are the issues of the faithful! Never any man repented him of the advancement of a good man.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 46–52

JOSEPH ADVANCED TO POWER AND PLACE.

In his new condition of dignity and honour, the following facts and characteristics are to be noted :—

I. The ripeness of his age and experience. He was now thirty years of age (verse 46), the age which was appointed for entering the priesthood, and in general, for manly service. (Num. iv. 3.) He had now lived for thirteen years in Egypt, and a considerable portion of that time was spent in prison. We are reminded that this was the age when the New Testament Joseph entered upon His ministry of love and mercy. (Luke iii. 23). Thus slowly and carefully does God prepare His servants for their great work. Even the Son of Man thought it meet to observe this propriety, and to endure this discipline. He, too, obeyed the law of growth, and waited His time. What a rebuke to those who are in haste to thrust their unripe fruit upon the world! Joseph was of ripe age and experience when he took upon him this office as a ruler of Egypt. That Providence which prepares events also prepares men for them.

II. The practical character of his mind. Joseph, though so suddenly and remarkably raised, is not puffed up with pride. He does not spend his time in self-admiration, nor go about to display his greatness, but at once betakes himself to business. And, first of all, with great sagacity he endeavours to obtain some knowledge of the area over which his work is to spread. He takes a general survey of the country. (Verse 46.) Then, having thus ascertained the extent of his work, he puts his plan into execution energetically, and without delay. (Verses 48, 49.) It was the grace of God that kept him above every temptation to pride and vain glory, and it was the same grace that gave him this sense of duty and obligation, and also this power to bring his knowledge and convictions to good effect.

III. The cheerful and hopeful character of his piety. In this time of his prosperity, two sons are born to him. (Verses 51, 52.) Their names are significant of his remembrance of God's goodness and of his cheerful hope for the future. 1. *He desires to forget all that is evil in the past.* "God hath made me to forget all my toil and all my father's house." He does not mean to say that he forgot absolutely, for he remembers them in these very words. But so far as they had been a source of sorrow and affliction to him, he remembers them no more. He is willing to forget the cruel treatment of his brethren. Love covers up and hides out of the willing sight of the mind all that is evil in the past. But Joseph still cherishes the better feelings of former days. Filial affection was still strong in his breast; but he was content, for the present, to cherish it in secret and to await the unfolding of Providence. 2. *He is thankful for present mercies.* "God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." His true home, after all, was in Canaan. Egypt is the land of his affliction, but even there God had made him fruitful and blessed him. He is thankful for the past with all its sorrow, and awaits with cheerful hope the promised mercies of his God. Above all he fails not to remember the Divine source of all his good.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 46. *Thirty years old.* This is mentioned, to show what wonderful graces he had attained at those years; what rare endowments both of piety and policy.—(*Trapp.*)

He made no sinecure of his office. He was, and he felt himself to be, exalted to power for the good and safety of the people, and he entered at once upon the active discharge of the duties of his station.—(*Bush.*)

New honours impose and demand new obligations.

Verses 47–49. Pharaoh hath not more preferred Joseph, than Joseph hath enriched Pharaoh; if Joseph had not ruled, Egypt and all the bordering nations had perished. The providence of so faithful an officer hath both given the Egyptians their lives, and the money, cattle, lands, bodies of the Egyptians to Pharaoh. The subjects owe to him their lives; the king, his subjects and his dominions. The bounty of God made Joseph able to give more than he received.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

Joseph's plan was simply a prudential foresight of the future. This prudence is a Christian virtue. It is such a virtue only so far as it has no reference to self. If we save in one thing only to spend in another, it may be a virtue, but certainly it is not a Christian one; that alone is Christian which is done for the sake of others. Thus, if we retrench our expenses in order to have more to bestow on others, it is Christian. Thus did Joseph. His economy was all for the sake of others. —(*Robertson.*)

The saving hand is full and beneficent; the squandering hand is not only empty, but unjust.—(*Lange.*)

Verse 51. He remembered his toils in the very utterance of this sentence. And he tenderly and intensely remembered his father's house. But he is grateful to God, who builds him a home, with all its soothing joys, even in the land of his exile. His heart again responds to long untasted joys.—(*Murphy.*)

How could he have retained just impressions of the Divine goodness if he had forgotten the evils from which he was delivered? But in another sense he forgets his misery. He did not so cherish the recollection as to allow it to embitter his present enjoyment. The painful remembrance of the past was expelled from his mind when his adversity was changed into prosperity.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 52. He had formerly been like a heath in the desert; but now he was like a tree planted by the rivers of water, which brings forth abundance of fruit, and whose leaf does not wither. (Gen. xlix. 22.)—(*Bush.*)

But why does no message go from Joseph to his mourning father? For many reasons. 1. He does not know the state of things at home. 2. He may not wish to open up the dark and bloody treachery of his brothers to his aged parent. But, 3. He bears in mind those early dreams of his childhood. All his subsequent experience has confirmed him in the belief that they will one day be fulfilled. But that fulfilment implies not only the submission of his brothers, but of his father. This is too delicate a matter for him to interfere in. He will leave it entirely to the all-wise providence of his God to bring about that strange issue. Joseph, therefore, is true to his life-long character. He leaves all in the hand of God, and awaits in anxious, but silent hope, the days when he will see his father and his brethren.—(*Murphy*).

In all Joseph's conduct we can discover a mournful longing after Canaan, deep indications that, after all, his true home was not in Egypt.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 53-57.

THE SEVEN YEARS OF FAMINE.

I. Joseph's administration. 1. *It showed great prudence and skill.* During the years of plenty he laid up for the years of famine. He was the prudent man that forseeth the evil. The time of plenty was the time of political and social salvation, and Joseph used it well. He did his work systematically and thoroughly. (Verse 48). Consequently he has plenty of bread for the people throughout the years of famine. The policy of *selling* the corn, instead of giving it, was both good and wise. The people would thus have the motive for exertion, and at the same time be able to maintain the dignity of, at least, a nominal purchase. 2. *It showed a spirit of dependence upon God.* The meaning of the dream was given to Joseph by the inspiration of God, and he had faith that God would carry out His own word. 3. *It was the exhibition of a character worthy of the highest confidence.* Pharaoh could only say to the Egyptians: "Go unto Joseph, what he saith to you, do." Both intellectual and spiritual qualities are required in a true ruler of men, and with both, in a remarkable degree, Joseph was endowed. A pious disposition, modest and retiring graces of character may adorn obscure lives, but he who has to deal much with mankind, and to take a position of command and influence in this world's business, must possess the wisdom of the serpent as well as the harmlessness of the dove. Mere piety by itself is not sufficient. Eli was a good, but a weak man, and therefore unfit to guide and command others. The power of intellect alone may be a power for evil, but combined with piety towards God it is a power for good.

II. Lessons. There are useful and important lessons to be learned from Joseph's administration during these seven years of famine. 1. *How quickly* *adversity waits upon prosperity!* It is thus in the experience of individual lives. God hath set one over against the other. Blessings grow out of our afflictions, and also afflictions grow out of our blessings. A man may live many years in prosperity, and rejoice in them all; "yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many." (Eccl. xi. 7.) 2. *What an advantage to have a true and powerful friend in the day of calamity!* This Joseph was the temporal saviour of his country, and of many surrounding nations. All stores were laid up with him, and their administration committed to him alone. We have a Saviour and Deliverer from greater evils than those which fell upon Egypt, even Jesus in whom all fulness dwells, and to whom all are invited to go who are perishing for lack of the bread of life. 3. *God often brings about His purposes of love and mercy by affliction.* His beneficent purposes concerning nations, families, individuals. God is represented as "calling" for a famine, and "breaking the whole staff of bread." (Ps. cv. 16.) He "called" for it that He might bring Jacob and his whole family into Egypt, and thus prepare those great events which were at length to bring his first begotten into the world for the salvation of mankind.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 53. When the people heard that the days of plenteousness were to be seven years, thousands would no doubt be strongly tempted to say to their souls, "Eat, drink, and be merry; to-morrow shall be as this day, and so shall the next and many following days and years be, and much more abundantly." But the day of prosperity was now at an end, and the days of adversity had arrived. The end of all the changing things in this world of change will soon come, and then the beginning of them will appear like yesterday when it is past. "A perpetuity of bliss is bliss," and that only. —(*Bush.*)

Verse 54. The evils threatened by God will fall heavily upon those who use not the proper means for averting them. Joseph could look forward with a steady eye, and without terror, to the days of famine, which came at the time specified, and were as grievous as he had predicted. When they came he knew that his wisdom would be acknowledged by all the land of Egypt, and by all the people of the surrounding countries. —(*Bush.*)

Good Jacob is pinched with the common famine. No piety can exempt us from the evils of neighbourhood. No man can tell, by outward events, which is the patriarch, and which the Canaanite.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

Verse 55. If any of the people had refused to go to Joseph, they would have despised not Joseph only, but the king who had clothed him with power. And are not the despisers of our great Redeemer in like manner despisers of His Father, who has set Him as King in His holy hill of Zion? If we need food for our souls, to whom are we to have recourse but to Jesus, whom God has appointed as the sole dispenser of that bread which nourisheth unto everlasting life? Those who will not come to Him for the bread of life are despisers of their own mercies.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 56. Joseph did not throw open his storehouses until the people felt the pressure of hunger, else they would have wasted the fruits of his provident care. God reserves the blessings of His salvation until we feel the want of them.

Verse 57. All that a man hath will he give for his life, and for those things that are necessary to preserve life. He will travel into the most distant regions rather than perish with hunger in the land of his nativity. Why, then, do men grudge a little labour, or a little expense, for what is no less necessary for our souls, than the bread that perisheth is for our bodies?—(*Bush.*)

Joseph is now filling up his generation work in useful and important labours; and like a true son of Abraham, he is ***blessed and made a blessing.*** Yet it was in the midst of this career of activity that his father Jacob said with a deep sigh, ***Joseph is not!*** What a large portion of our troubles would subside, if we knew but the whole truth!—(***Fuller.***)

CHAPTER XLII.

Critical Notes.—**6. Governor.]** "The word rendered governor, *Shalit*, is, except here, said to be only found in the books contemporary with and following the Captivity. *Salatis* is given by Josephus as the title of the first shepherd-king."—(*Alford.*)—**9. Spies]** "This dynasty, we are told by Manetho, was ever in fear of invasion from the then powerful Assyrians, and Josephus says that on that account they fortified the eastern side of Egypt. Hence men arriving from Asia, and especially Jacob's sons, who from their Chaldaic origin were more like the eastern Semitic peoples than Canaanites, might well arouse suspicion as to their being Assyrian spies."—(*Alford*).—*The nakedness of the land.* Its unfortified cities, unprotected boundaries—exposed as a man unarmed, having fewer strong places than any other countries.—**15. By the life of Pharaoh.]** The Egyptians swore by the life of their kings. There are similar instances among the Hebrews themselves. (1 Sam. xvii. 55; 2 Sam. xi. 11.) A similar form is found in the address of Abigail to David. (1 Sam. xxv. 36.)—**23. Interpreter.]** Heb. *The interpreter*—of the court. This official was not necessarily employed in interpreting a foreign tongue. He was the medium through which the prime minister was wont to speak to others.—**25. Fill their sacks with corn.]** Heb. *Vessels, i.e.*, any portable article in which grain may be carried.—**Into his sack,]** Heb. *Sack*,—the very word which remains in our language unto this day.—**27. In the Inn.]** "A camping place for the night rather than a caravansera. The term is from a verb meaning to *lodge*, and has the local prefix. These halting grounds are well understood by travellers, and are fixed according to the distance and the convenience of water for man and beast."—(*Jacobus.*) There are no places of entertainment; even at the present day, in this desert over which they had to pass.—**28. And their heart failed them.]** Heb. *And their heart went forth.* Thus, Cant. v. 6., "My soul failed when he spake." (Heb. "Went forth.") They had no courage left.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1, 2.

The Famine in the House of Jacob.

I. Considered in its bearing upon the Divine purposes concerning the chosen people. It had been long ago predicted that the covenant people should be afflicted in a strange land four hundred years. God used ordinary means to bring this about. The family of Jacob must be driven to Egypt, and there increase to a nation, and by affliction and oppression be trained for entry into the Promised Land. It is remarkable that, not only Jacob, but his fathers Abraham and Isaac, had experienced a famine in Canaan and by reason of it were driven into Egypt. This must have sorely tried their faith; for the land which was promised to them seemed to be a land which ate up its inhabitants. But these afflictions wrought good for their souls, and trained them to lose sight of all selfish aims in religion and to be concerned only for the glory of God. They learned to submit to whatever means God might be pleased to use to bring about His purposes.

II. Considered in its effect upon Jacob's sons. "Why do ye look one upon another?" This sad question revealed—1. *The utmost distress.* They were as men who were stunned by a sudden blow. 2. *Great perplexity* They could do nothing else but thus look one upon another. They seemed utterly helpless. 3. *Forebodings of conscience.* It was not altogether the great calamity of famine that made them so helpless and afraid. Conscience was now awake and filled them with other fears. Why must they wait for Jacob to tell them that there was corn in Egypt, and to suggest the obvious course of going down thither to buy? They surely must have heard this, and have known that in their very neighbourhood a caravan of travellers was already making preparation for that journey. (ver. 5.) The news that there was plenty of food in Egypt would naturally spread rapidly all over the country. Distress has a quick ear. Why, then, are Jacob's sons of all others the last to bestir themselves to seek help! Alas! to their guilty conscience, Egypt is a dreaded name, a threatening calamity, a foreboding evil. To them the road to Egypt is haunted by the memory of an awful crime.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Jacob's words resemble those of the four lepers: "Why sit we here until we die?" It is a dictate of nature not to despair while there is a door of hope; and the principle will hold good in things of everlasting moment. Why sit we here, poring over our guilt and misery, when we have heard that with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him there is plenteous redemption? How long shall we take counsel in our soul, having sorrow in our hearts daily? Let us trust in His mercy, and our hearts shall rejoice in His salvation.—*(Fuller.)*

Verse 2. Here the Divine decree of Israel's sojourning and suffering in Egypt begins to be fulfilled, by a wonderful providence. The fulness of Joseph's barns invites Jacob first to send, and then to go thither himself for relief. Shall not the fulness that is in Christ (John i. 16) incite and entice us to come to Him, as bees to a meadow full of flowers; as merchants to the Indies, full of spices and other riches; as the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, full of wisdom; as Jacob's sons to Egypt, full of corn, in that extreme famine; that we may return with treasures full fraught with treasures of truth and grace?—*(Trapp.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses 3–20.*

THE FIRST JOURNEY OF JACOB'S BRETHREN INTO EGYPT.

I. They show evident signs of fear. Therefore they go together in a company, ten strong, that by their numbers they might encourage and support one another. (ver. 3).

II. Their worst forbodings are fulfilled. They dreaded Egypt, and events justified their fears. 1. *They are received roughly.* (ver. 7.) Joseph acted the part of a foreigner, and treats them with a heartless and haughty indifference. With their peculiarities of feature, attitude, and mother tongue, he knew them. But they did not know him; for twenty years had made a great change in a youth of seventeen. Besides, his beard was shaven, he had on Egyptian attire, and spoke in a foreign tongue, and above all was found in such an exalted position. Therefore they failed to recognise him. This rough reception had dark suggestions for them. Their conscience read it as the beginning of sorrows. 2. *They are suspected of evil designs.* "Ye are spies,' said Joseph, "to see the nakedness of the land ye are come." (ver. 9.) The suspicion which Joseph expressed was unfounded, and he knew it to be so. But he was acting a part for the purpose of bringing their guilt home to them. He disguised, for the time, under a hard aspect a loving design. Yet his suspicion (even though it be regarded as expressing no real conviction on his part), expresses a righteous judgment—a stern moral fact, that guilty men who conceal a crime demanding open atonement, must ever encounter suspicion as a reflex of their evil secret. They felt that, though not in form, yet in reality that suspicion was justified. 3. *They are threatened with the prospect of imprisonment and death.* (vers 15, 20.) They must remain in ward until their words be proved. And if unable to verify them, their lives were to be forfeited.

III. Great principles of God's moral government are illustrated in this history. 1. *That pride is sure to meet with a fall.* In verse 6 we are told that "Joseph's brethren came and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth." Where were now those lofty looks, and that contemptuous tone with which they said—when Joseph had told them one of his dreams—"Shalt thou then indeed reign over us, or shalt thou have dominion over us?" They now bow themselves with the most abject humility before that very man of whom they said, on another occasion, "Come, let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will see what will become of his dreams." 2. *That nothing can hinder the counsel of the Lord from taking effect.* Joseph's brethren tried their utmost to prevent the fulfilment of his dreams; but all the while they were really working towards this very end. They were accomplishing the will of God concerning Joseph though they knew it not. They knew not how wonderful is the Lord of Hosts in counsel, and how excellent in working. 3. *That the crisis will arrive when the wicked must appear before the judgment seat of the pious.* The time will come when the oppressors and the oppressed must meet together. The saints shall judge the world by their very position, for righteouness carries in itself the condemnation of sin. The highest form of this truth is "that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. v. 10). We must all come into the presence of Jesus Christ the Righteous, who will make manifest what we really are and appoint us our true place. 4. *That retribution, even in kind, follows sin.* Joseph was hated of his brethren for being his father's spy, and now the time has come when they themselves are treated as spies. He who was hungry when they were eating now holds the food for which they hunger. They condemned Joseph to the pit, and now he judges them. That same thing which a man sows he also reaps. 5. *That throughout the severity of God's righteous anger against sin there runs a purpose of mercy.* Joseph put on a stern demeanour. (ver. 7.) He must bring his brethren to a sense of their sin by lifting the rod of justice against them. And yet he feels more distress than the objects of his chastisement. He is like a wise and just father who feels compelled to punish his son, though all the time it goes sore against his heart. A merciful intention must often wear this hard aspect. Joseph afflicted his brethren for their good. He disguises his private feelings, and acts for the time with stern justice. But when the harsh remedy had wrought its end, then he relents, and the prevailing kindness of his nature is free to flow. And so God loves us, yet with a love which does not shrink from severity. But the purpose which underlies all His dealings is kind. He wounds only in order that he might heal. "He will not always chide, neither will He keep His anger for ever. (Ps. ciii.)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 3, 4. The family is spoken of in their relation to Joseph, not as Jacob's ten sons, but as Joseph's ten brethren. He is the hero of the narrative. Benjamin was Joseph's brother in a special sense, as born of the same mother, and beloved by the father in Joseph's stead, so that he could not bear to part with him for fear the like calamity might fall upon him as befell Joseph. How little does Jacob know what is good or evil in Providence!—(*Jacobus*).

The guilt of Benjamin's brothers seems to weigh upon the father's heart as a kind of presentiment.—(*Lange*).

Verse 5. The expression *sons of Israel*, instead of sons of Jacob, points to Israel the man of faith, whose children they were, who accompanied them with his prayers, and for whose sake, though he knew it not, this journey to Egypt, so dark in its commencement, became a blessing to them all.—(*Lange*).

Verse 6. *They bowed down themselves before him*, etc. This fulfils most literally the dream of Joseph, which up to this time had seemed so impossible to human view. Joseph had doubtless rested in the confidence of this result as thus revealed to him, and had felt it his duty to wait patiently upon God through his long years of trial.—(*Jacobus*).

Verses 7, 8. What must have been his feelings! The remembrance of the manner in which he parted from them two and twenty years ago, the events which had befallen him, their prostration before him, and the absence of Benjamin, from which he might be apprehensive that they also had made away with him,—altogether must have been a great shock to his sensibility. Let him beware, or his countenance will betray him. He feels the danger of this, and immediately puts on a stern look, speaks roughly to them, and affects to take them for spies. By this innocent piece of artifice, he could interrogate them, and get out of them all the particulars that he wished without betraying himself, which he could not have done by any other means.—(*Fuller.*)

God sometimes brings us to a sense of our sins by hiding Himself from us, and standing afar off.

He did not allow his personal feelings to interfere with what seemed to him his duty. Joseph's love to his brethren was a noble love. God's love to us is still nobler, and severity accompanies it. It does not shrink from human suffering, for suffering is necessary for the man's well being.—(*Robertson.*)

Verse 9. Such an imputation as this remains to this day, that to which a stranger is continually exposed in the East. The Orientials generally have no idea that people will make a journey unless from urgent necessity, or on gainful speculations. Curiosity, or the desire of collecting information, are motives perfectly incomprehensible to them, and are always treated as shallow and childish pretences. They ask triumphantly whether you have no trees, birds, animals, rivers, or ruins at home to engage your attention, that you should come so far to look for them.—(*Bush.*)

This is the Oriental method of challenging a stranger. In truth it is the very idea of the European passport system, which puts every traveller under so much suspicion of mischievous intent as to put him constantly upon the proof of an honest and good object in his visit.—(*Jacobus.*)

He was not only to bless, but also to punish and judge, *i.e.*, become forgetful of all human relations and act divinely. A similar position God assumes towards believers when in tribulation. Let us, therefore, hold assuredly that all our misfortunes, trials, and lamentations, even death itself, are nothing but a hearty and fair display of the Divine goodness towards us.—(*Luther.*)

Joseph remembered the dreams. Event is the best interpreter of Divine oracles. The disciples understood not many things at first that our Saviour said to them. (John ii. 22; xii. 16.) So John Baptist's preaching wrought not for some years after it was delivered, and then it did. (John x. 41, 42.)—(*Trapp.*)

Verses 10–13. It was not likely

that ten sons of one man would be sent on the hazardous duty of spies. *And behold the youngest is with our father this day.* It is intensely interesting to Joseph to hear that his father and his full brother are still living. *And one is not.* Time has assuaged all their bitter feelings, both of exasperation against Joseph, and of remorse for their unbrotherly conduct. This little sentence, however, cannot be uttered by them, or heard by Joseph, without emotion.—*(Murphy.)*

Verses 14–16. *Send one of you.* This proposal is enough to strike terror into their hearts. The return of one would be a heavy, perhaps a fatal, blow to their father. And how can one brave the perils of the way? They cannot bring themselves to concur in this plan. Sooner will they all go to prison, as accordingly they do. Joseph is not without a strong conviction of incumbent duty in all this. He knows he has been put in the position of lord over his brethren in the fore-ordination of God, and he feels bound to make this authority a reality for their moral good.—*(Murphy.)*

Verses 17–20. Here they lie three days; a period which afforded him time to think what to do, and them to reflect on what they had done. On the third day he paid them a visit, and that in a temper of more apparent mildness. He assures them that he has no design, upon their life, and ventures to give a reason for it which must appear to them no less surprising than satisfying: *I fear God.* What, an Egyptian nobleman know and fear the true God! If so, they can have no injustice to fear at his hands! nor can he withhold food from a starving family. The fear of God will ever be connected with justice and humanity to man. But how mysterious! If he be a good man, how is it that he should treat us so roughly? How is it that God should suffer him so to mistake our designs? Their hearts must surely at this time have been full. Such were the means which God by this wise man made use of to bring them to repentance. This indeed is His ordinary method of dealing with sinners. Now their fears are awakened by threatnings, or adverse providences, in which death sometimes stares them in the face; and now a little gleam of hope arises, just sufficient to keep the mind from sinking; yet all is covered with doubt and mystery. It is thus, as by alternate frost and rain, and sunshine upon the earth, that He humbleth the mind, and maketh soft the heart of man.—*(Fuller.)*

The true God had not been altogether forgotten in Egypt. Pharaoh had already confessed Him. (Gen. xli. 38, 39.)

This mention of the fear of God would have a two-fold effect upon these men. 1. Encouragement. They would thus be assured that they would be dealt with by a higher principle than expediency or political considerations, even by the just law of heaven. Joseph served the same God in whom their fathers trusted. 2. Alarm. The mention of God's name would serve to bring home to him a conviction of their sin.

The only permanent and true basis of morality is the fear of God.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 21–24.

THE MEMORY OF CONSCIENCE.

I. It is sure to awaken, though it may slumber long. Reuben's words show that they believed that Joseph was dead. (Verse 22.) All was now over and past concerning him, and the deeds of that dark day, when they sold him into slavery, had almost faded from their recollection. But now, after so many years of almost complete forgetfulness, the memory of conscience is suddenly awakened. It is doubtful whether any thought, deed, or impression can depart clean for ever from the mind. The buried things of memory rise again, and appear in all their living and awful reality. No guilty deed can be completely forgotten. The time must come when conscience will revive it.

II. It is sometimes awakened by outward trouble. These guilty men thought that as Joseph was now sheltered from their enmity in the grave, they had naught to fear from his revenge. But their deed was not dead, and now it is crying for vengeance. In their present trouble they read their just punishment. Thus by affliction God forces us to bring our sins to mind. We are driven to enquire wherefore He has a controversy with us.

III. It is faithful and just. 1. *In that it brings the past accurately to mind.* The memory of conscience is faithful and exact in reproducing the past, so that every circumstance of an evil deed comes to recollection most vividly. These men now remember their cruelty with all the aggravations of it, how they beheld unmoved by pity the anguish of a brother, how they refused to hear him when in vain he cried for mercy, and would not even listen to the prayer of one of their number, who relenting, interceded on his behalf. All the terrible scenes of that dark day lived again as if they had been but yesterday. They well knew that murder was intended; and though their deed was not actually a deed of blood, yet it was really such to them now. "One is not," said they, "Behold also his blood is required." The records of the past may be written as with invisible ink, but the writing stands out revealed when held before the fires of affliction. 2. *In that it connects the penalty with the sin.* Conscience not only brings the past accurately to mind, but also stamps its moral character and proclaims its results. These men accused themselves. Their hearts told them the truth. They see in their present punishment the penalty for their past sin. They would not hear Joseph in his distress, and now they could not be heard. They had cast him into a pit, and now they themselves are cast into a prison. Reuben gives them to expect blood for blood.

IV. It converts moral direction and remonstrance into reproach and upbraiding. Reuben became to his brethren what conscience becomes to the sinner. Conscience first shows what is right, and afterwards, when sinned against, reproaches and upbraids. When the penalties of a righteous judgment overtake the sinner, conscience turns accuser and casts them in his teeth, and forebodes the worst consequences.

V. It reminds us of moral processes now at work in the world. God's searching providence is ever bringing past sins to light. Though his brethren knew it not, Joseph was there all the time and heard their self-accusations. He allowed this moral chastisement, and these forebodings and retributions to take effect. And so the Lord Jesus—our Joseph—passes through the world unknown, unrecognized, and sees what sinners have done against Him. He anticipates judgment already, with His fan in His hand thoroughly purging His floor. The light of His Cross reveals the darkness of the world's guilt. The thoughts of many hearts are revealed.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 21. Joseph's treatment of his brethren had gained its end. They were humbled before him with shame and sorrow for their sin.

Here again we are reminded of our New Testament Joseph, who sometimes seems to hide Himself to us behind the law and behind our sins, but only to make the mutual recognition the more blessed. All this stirring up of their circle of brotherhood, makes the conscience of Joseph's betrayal and sale more sharp. And so Jesus will have us remember with grief and self-reproach how we have betrayed Him and abused His love. But all this should be only in order to the more earnest embrace of that love. —(*Jacobus.*)

They could see in each other's looks that the same thoughts were in the minds of all. How universal is conscience!

It would be well for us if we could entertain the same views of sin in the time of temptation that we are likely to have after it is committed, or at the time when trouble brings it home to our consciences.—(*Bush.*)

The Recording Angel, consider it well, is no fable, but the truest of truths: the paper tablets thou canst burn; of the "iron leaf" there is no burning.—(*T. Carlyle.*)

Verse 22. It was fit that they should be made to feel the stings of conscience; and it was proper that he should be the remembrancer of their crime, because he had warned them against it. And how utterly inexcusable do his words represent the deed. "Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child." What apology could they offer? Did they consider his telling his dreams an insult? He was but a child. Had they a right to destroy a youth of seventeen years of age because he had not all the wisdom and caution of a man of thirty? —(*Bush.*)

Verses 23, 24. Joseph stood by and heard and understood it all without their suspecting it; but such words were too much for the heart of man, at least such a man as he was, to hear, and the pretended Egyptian becomes, in spite of himself, a real Israelite.—(*Bush.*)

There might be a fitness in taking Simeon rather than any other. He had proved himself a ferocious character by his conduct towards the Shechemites; and therefore it is not unlikely that he was one of the foremost in the cruelty practised towards Joseph. Perhaps he was the man who tore off his coat of many colours, and threw him into the pit. If so, it would tend to humble him, and heighten all their fears, as beholding the righteous judgment of God.—(*Fuller.*)

They had heard Joseph's deprecation of their evil with tears, and had not pitied him; yet Joseph doth but hear their mention of this evil which they had done against him, and pities them with tears; he weeps for joy to see their repentance, and to compare his safety and happiness with the cruelty which they intended, and did, and thought they had done. Yet he can abide to see his brother his prisoner, whom no bonds could bind so strong, as his affection bound him to his captive.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 25–28.

THE MISERIES OF AN AWAKENED CONSCIENCE.

I. They pursue the sinner everywhere. In a strange land, and far from any human habitation, these men are suddenly alarmed. Time and place are nothing to conscience. When once awakened it will not allow the sinner to rest.

II. They drive the sinner to put the worst construction upon every event. Joseph's real motive in treating his brethren thus, was love; but that love was now operating so as to confound, perplex, and dismay them. They read it as a design to ensnare and find occasion against them. Thus when our conscience is awakened, we are alarmed and confounded even by those things which may be really working for our peace.

III. They are intended to lead the sinner to repentance. By this harsh treatment Joseph designed, as an immediate purpose, to fill the minds of his brethren with consternation and fear. But he had a deeper purpose of love. He hoped to bring them to humble their souls in penitence before God, so that they might feel the guilt of their sin and obtain forgiveness. In this way God deals with the sinner when He would bring him to a right mind; leads him into dark and perplexing situations so that he is utterly unable to perceive the design. By turns his hopes and his fears are awakened, so that he might be forced to bring his sin to remembrance and feel his utter danger and helplessness. The evil which God thus brings upon awakened souls is only that deep darkness which precedes the dawn. Had Joseph's brethren known all, they could not have been brought to the right state of mind. And so, if we knew all God's designs concerning us, it is possible that we might be spared some pain, yet might we miss many a salutary lesson. If we are in God's way at all, there is a meaning of goodness for us—a purpose of love and blessing. But God's order is this,—that it is only by the law, which brings home to us the knowledge of sin, that we can obtain the blessings of the Gospel.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 25–28. They construe this circumstance to mean something against them; but in what way they know not. They do not reproach the man, the lord of the land, though it is likely from his treatment of them that they would suspect some ill design against them: but overlooking second causes they ask, "What is this that God hath done to us!" To His righteous judgment they attributed what they had already met with (verses 21, 22), and now it seems to them that He is still in a mysterious way, and with a design to require their brother's blood at their hand. Such a construction, though painful for the present, was the most useful to them of any that could have been put upon it.—(*Fuller.*)

Simeon is left in pawn, in fetters; the rest return with their corn, with their money, paying nothing for their provision but their labour; that they might be as much troubled with the beneficence of that strange Egyptian lord, as before with his imperious suspicion. Their wealth was now more irksome to them than their need; and they fear God means to punish them more in this superfluity of money than in the want of victuals. It is a wise course to be jealous of our gain; and more to fear, than desire abundance.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 29–38.

THE INCREASING TROUBLES OF JACOB'S OLD AGE.

I. The causes which led to them. 1. *The strange perplexity into which his sons had been brought.* They related to their father the rough treatment they had received in Egypt, and how one of their brethren was detained in pledge until they should return with their youngest brother. When one of them opened his sack's mouth, on the journey, he was alarmed to find his money tied up with it; but when they all emptied their sacks in their father's presence, how great must have been their consternation when they saw that "every man's bundle of money was in his sack." (Verse 35.) Jacob understood their trouble, and like them he feared the worst. He has the corn, indeed, but with it sorrow upon sorrow. 2. *The opening again of an old wound.* He is reminded again of Joseph, and all the old trouble comes back to him. (Verse 32.) The wound which time had but imperfectly healed bleeds afresh. 3. *The loss of all earthly* *hope.* To poor Jacob all was now well nigh gone. Every earthly hope was lost now, save one, and that also was in danger of being taken away. (Verse 36.) Looking over his past life, he felt that all had failed. "All these things are against me," he said. Let there come but one more calamity (and he had too much reason to fear it) then would the cup of his sorrow be full, "then shall ye bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave." (Verse 38.)

II. The weaknesses in Jacob's character which they reveal. 1. *Querulousness and despondency.* The former was natural to an old man who had seen so much sorrow. But there was also a prevailing sadness about Jacob's character which led him to look on the dark side of events. He was inclined to magnify his sorrows until they spread a gloom over his whole life and shut out the light of hope. 2. *Want of strong faith in God.* Jacob was really reflecting upon Providence when he said, "All these things are against me." No man who had strong faith to see the "end of the Lord," which is gracious and loving even through a frowning Providence, could utter such words. And yet Jacob casts these dark reflections upon God's dealings, though God had once said to him, "I will surely do thee good." Thus he who once wrestled with God and man, and prevailed, now shows the weakness of his faith. It was not for want of light, and frequent supports, and encouragement that Jacob betrayed this weakness of faith. It is to be traced to the native selfishness of his character His very religion had, all the way through, a strong trace of selfishness. The idea of bargain entered largely into it. He seemed one who studied his own ease, comfort, and prosperity; getting all he could for himself, and giving as little as possible. He who lives upon this principle will, in the end, find such religion as he has to fail him. Unless he has faith and hope in God above, despite all appearances, he will find every earthly foundation to give way under him until nothing is left. He must go deep down to find his rock in God. Nothing else can stand, for faith can never be secure and constant unless it lays hold upon Him above who is "ever faithful, ever sure." God's ways to Jacob were indeed mysterious; he was a much tried man, but yet he ought to have triumphed over all his difficulties. Job was tried with greater sorrows, and yet he had the strength to say of his God who was afflicting him, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." (Job. xiii. 15.) We have heard of the patience of Job, and we know how trouble served only to purify his soul and to give him a clear and sure knowledge of Divine things. (Job xlii. 5, 6). Jacob relied too much upon human agents, and upon the course of events. He lacked the faith of that father of believers who could give up his Isaac. He failed to see that if God had promised to be with him, no evil could finally prevail over him. He thinks of the grave only as a refuge from the sorrows of the world. The thought which he utters is painful, but it is only the passionate expression of feelings which had long been pent up within him. He now declares the melancholy suspicion which he had carried in the depths of his own heart for many a year. As time went on, the prospects and fortunes of his family seemed to grow only darker, and now the end had come. There is nothing left for him but to go down to the grave with sorrow, his life uncompleted, his hopes unrealised. He speaks not as one who looks forward to the rest of the grave when his soul is satisfied with life and the blessing of the Lord, whose faith has overcome the world, and who has the blessed prospect of joining the company of those who have triumphed and have entered into their rest. This is a dark moment with Jacob, but he will yet recover his faith, and triumph in the Lord.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 29–34. Their narrative must have given their father a very bad idea of the lord of the land. They said nothing of him but the truth. And yet Jacob must have formed an opinion far remote from the truth. Joseph must have appeared to him as an insolent, overbearing tyrant, that made use of his power to crush poor men under his feet. "Surely," might the patriarch have said, "the fear of God is not before the eyes of this man, who shows so little regard to the comfort, the liberty, the lives of his fellow-men. Yet Joseph's conduct towards his brethren was full of wisdom and mercy. He dealt hardly with them that he might do them good. So far is the appearance from always corresponding with the reality of things. "Judge nothing before the time."—(*Bush*,)

Verses 35, 36. The mysterious circumstance of the money being found by the way in their sacks, they appear to have concealed. Mention is made of only one of the sacks being opened; yet by what they afterwards said to the steward (Gen. xliii. 21), it appears that they opened them all, and found every man's money in his sack's mouth. But they might think their father would have blamed them for not returning with it when they were only a day's journey from Egypt, and therefore agreed to say nothing to him about it, but leave him to find it out. Hence it is that they are represented as discovering the money in a manner as if they knew nothing of it before; not only participating with their father in his apprehensions, but seeming also to join with him in his surprise.—(*Fuller.*)

Old Jacob, that was not used to simple and absolute contentments, receives the blessing of seasonable provision, together with the affliction of that heavy message, the loss of one son and the danger of another; and he knows not whether it be better for him to die with hunger or with grief, for the departure of that son of his right-hand. He drives off all till the last. Protraction is a kind of ease in evils that must come.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

Jacob's declarations betray a feeling that the brothers were not guiltless respecting Joseph's disappearance. He knew their jealousy, and he had experienced the violent disposition of Simeon and Levi.—(*Lange.*)

All these things are against me. How did Jacob know this? Because his feelings, his affections, and the general sense of mankind, told him it was a great misery to lose a son, especially the best and most beloved of sons. But, in fact, the very reverse was the case, as Jacob afterwards found, Joseph was sent before him into Egypt to provide sustenance for his family; Simeon was bound in prison to mortify his haughty spirit; Benjamin was to be taken away that he might find Joseph alive and happy. A great portion of our present trouble arises from our not knowing the whole truth.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 37. Reuben is once more the tender-hearted one. He offers everything that he may prevail with his father. "But it is out of reason what he offers" (*Luther*).—(*Lange.*)

The motive may be good when the speech is rash. It is well to beware of strong assertions which are far beyond our meaning, and besides have in them a tincture of levity and impiety.

A simple and sinful offer. Reuben was the eldest, but not the wisest. However, of him we may learn, in our parent's fear, to be hardy and hearty; in our brethren's distress to be eager and earnest.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 38. He puts them in mind of his grey hairs, which always constitute a claim for reverence, but more especially from children. It was natural that he should make the strongest possible appeal to the filial sentiments of his children, to spare him the crushing sorrow which he saw likely to overwhelm him; yet in saying he should die of grief he went beyond the bounds of a reasonable apprehension. But in this Jacob utters the language of human infirmity, and all that are human will be slow to condemn in him what they would probably evince in themselves.—(*Bush.*)

Painful as it is, this last, bitterest stroke of parting with Benjamin must be endured for the happy issue. "The darkest hour is just before the day." In the mount of Jehovah shall be seen as it was with Abraham. God brings His chosen people through sorrow to joy, and through labour to rest.—(*Jacobus.*)

CHAPTER XLIII.

Critical Notes.—7. **The man asked us straitly.**] Heb., "Asking, asked." He earnestly enquired about us and our kindred.—9. **Let me bear the blame for ever.**] Heb., "I shall be a sinner to thee all the days." He would consent to be reputed guilty of violating his plighted faith. Thus in 1 Kings i. 21, *shall be counted offenders* is literally, "shall be sinners." 11. **The best fruits in the land.**] Heb., "The song, music, or melody of the land." The idea is, that for which the land is celebrated, those productions which are the pride of the land and which have given rise to songs of praise. *A little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds.* "These are the same (excepting in two cases) with the articles conveyed to Egypt by the Ishmaelites (Gen. xxxvii. 25). These are articles that grow best in a drought."—(*Jacobus*). None of these would be necessarily affected by the failure of wheat.—12. **Take double money in your hand.**] "The meaning is not, as would appear from the A.V., that they were to take *three* payments,—double money *besides* that which was in their sacks—but that they were to take money of *a second*, *i.e.*, the same amount. And so they describe what they had done, though not with the same Hebrew word, verse 22."—(*Alford*).—14. **God Almighty.**] Heb. El Shaddai. (Gen. xvii. 1; xxxv. 2.)—16. **Slay, and make ready.**] "The objection which has been here found, that the higher castes of the Egyptians ate no animal food, only shows the ignorance of the objectors. We know abundantly from Herodotus and other authorities, that it was only from certain animals that the royal and priestly castes abstained, and only certain among them that abstained altogether; and the eating of birds was general.—(*Alford.*)—23. **I had your money.**] Heb. "Your money came to me." He means to tell them, "You cannot be called to account for the money, for I had it. Whatever became of it afterwards, I hereby acknowledge the receipt of it for the corn. You are credited with payment in full; therefore give yourselves no uneasiness on that score."—(*Bush.*)—27. **Is your father well?**] Heb. "Is there peace to your father?"—28. **Thy servant, our father, is in good health, he is yet alive?**] Heb., "Peace to thy servant our father—he yet lives."—29. **God be gracious to thee, my son.**] "Benjamin was only about a year old when Joseph was sold, as he was sixteen years the younger."—(*Jacobus.*)—32. **And they set on for himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians which did eat with him, by themselves; because the Egyptians might not eat with the Hebrews; for that is an abomination unto the Egyptians.**] "The law of caste separated different ranks of Egyptians to different tables. And Herodotus mentions the unwillingness of the Egyptians to have any familiar intercourse with foreigners. The Egyptians were prevented from eating with the Hebrews because the latter slew and ate animals which the former regarded as sacred—the cow, the ox, etc. Besides, the Hebrews did not practise the same religious ceremonies at meals as the Egyptians."—(*Jacobus.*)—34. **And he sent messes unto them from before him.**] It was the practice in the East to honour guests in this manner. (1 Sam. ix. 23.) *Five times as much as any of theirs.* "The number *five* seems to have been in especial regard in Egypt. (Gen. xli. 34; xlv. 22; xlvii. 2, 24; Isa. xix. 18.) The reason is stated to have been, that the Egyptians recognized only five planets."—(*Alford.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–14.

Jacob Under the Pressure of Want.

I. **His change of resolution.** He had refused, at first, to part with Benjamin. Even Reuben's desperate proposal was rejected. (Gen. xliii. 37.) But Judah's proposal is accepted (verse 9), for the father had confidence in the honesty, frankness, and persevering energy of this son. Judah makes a practical appea to his father, and puts the case before him in all its stern reality. His argument was unanswerable. (Verse 8.) Jacob now sees the dire necessity of the situation: His sons must go to Egypt without their younger brother. The affection of the father now struggles with the dread of famine, and after one more feeble objection Jacob submits. (Verse 6.) He who once said, "My son shall not go down with you," makes up his mind at last to say, "Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man." (Verse 13.) Thus we learn gradually to submit to what we plainly see is the will of God. How great is power of want, in the hands of Providence; how inexorable its demands!

II. His piety throughout. 1. *His faith in God.* "God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother and Benjamin." (Verse 14.) This was that name of God under which Abraham was blessed: "I am God Almighty," and also that which Isaac invoked in blessing Jacob, "God Almighty bless thee, and give thee the blessing of Abraham." Jacob must now have thought of the covenant promises and blessings. Now he is forced by hard necessity most entirely to cast himself upon God, for now nothing else is left to which he can cling. It is the property of faith to make ventures; and we do not know what great faith is until we are called upon to give up something that we hold most dear, and cast ourselves upon the eternal love of God alone. When all is gone, our faith must still look to God, who is our soul's true portion. 2. *His honest principle.* Jacob commands his sons to take back the money which they found in their sacks, saying, "Peradventure it was an oversight." (Verse 12.) It is true religious honesty to return that which comes to us by the mistake of others. 3. *His resignation.* Jacob does not behave as one who is forced to yield to fate, while his heart rebels against it. His is not the stoical acceptance of destiny. It is the resignation of a religious mind. He yields in a manner worthy of a man of God, "If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." (Verse 14.) He is willing to resign all entirely into the hands of God. It is as if he had said, "I commit the event unreservedly to God. If it seems good to him to bereave me of my children, the will of the Lord be done; I have nothing to say. The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away." 4. *It is no reflection on his piety that he changed his purpose.* The fact that Jacob in consenting to give up Benjamin changed his purpose, lays him open to the charge of inconsistency. But the circumstances are all changed now. The famine continues, want stares them all in the face, and he has to choose between the dreadful alternative of starvation and the risking of the life of one son. We may be too careful about keeping up what we call our own consistency. For, after all, if a man is under no circumstances to change his conduct, then would conversion be impossible. Consistent with the unchanging truth of God, with the eternal law of righteousness, we must and ought to be; but not invariably consistent with ourselves; for our goodness is imperfect, and we are liable to mistake and error. Instead of adjusting our present conduct to our former habits and thoughts, we should act upon our present convictions, leaving the present and the past to reconcile themselves as they may. It is only by looking continually to God, and not to ourselves that we can walk sure-footedly in the present life.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1, 2. They had, indeed, met with difficulties and dangers on their former journey, but greater difficulties and dangers must be encountered to prevent worse. Let it not be thought a hard matter that the service of Christ often requires peculiar hardships and hazards. The world requires as great sacrifices as Christ, and is far less able to recompense them. In labouring for the meat that endureth to everlasting life, we seldom meet with such difficulties and perils as are often encountered in labouring for the meat that perisheth.—(*Bush.*)

Verses 3–9. The duties of parents and children. 1. Children should obey their parents in the Lord. But, 2. Parents should not enjoin upon their children that which is unreasonable, or impracticable. 3. Children should consider the infirmities of aged parents, should bear with them, and especially should not interpret unkindly or severely what they may say under the pressure of extraordinary affliction. The sons of Jacob set an example here. They did not blame their father for bringing this groundless charge against them, but are content calmly to justify their conduct by pointing out the necessity of the case

Judah is the eloquent one among his brethren. His eloquence had carried the measure of Joseph's sale; it had prevailed on Jacob to send Benjamin with them; and here, finally, it makes Joseph unable to endure the restraint which he wished to put upon himself.—(*Delitzsah*).

The end, however, is attained, not more by his touching eloquence than by his heroic deed, when he offers himself as surety for Benjamin, and is willing to sacrifice himself by taking his place.—(*Lange*).

Verse 10. Men blinded by affection too often disappoint themselves, and by needless and unwise delays cut themselves off from the enjoyment of much happiness that they might otherwise have secured to themselves.—*Bush*).

Verse 11. Perplexity is blind and untractable. Let the mind but settle, and it will soon yield to a reasonable motion, if seasonable, especially as this of Judah was: for besides the weightiness of his words, necessity now speaks for him, that most powerful orator.—(*Trapp*).

A rash man will, at all hazards, obstinately persist in a course once determined upon, but a wise man will yield to reason. The manner in which the patriarch acquiesces is worthy of remark. It is not the sullen consent of one who yields to fate while his heart rebels against it. He yields in a manner worthy of a man of God, proposing first that every possible means should be used to conciliate the man, the lord of the land, and then committing the issue of the whole to God. He recollected the effect of a present in appeasing his brother Esau's anger when coming against him with an armed host.—(*Bush*).

Take of the best fruits. Of the verse or melody, saith the original; that is, of the most praiseworthy fruits; such as deserve to be commended in verse, and sung of, to the praise of God the giver.—(*Trapp*).

The prized fruits of the land of Canaan. In Jacob's words there appears an objective poetry, or the *poetry of the lands*, as it may be called. It consists of their noblest products, not as they serve the common wants of life, but rather its healing, adornment, and festivity. When he selected them, however, Jacob could have but little thought how mighty the influence these noble gifts of Canaan's soil would have upon the great Egyptian ruler—how they would impress him as the wonders of his youth, the glories of his native land.—(*Lange.*)

Verse 12. Jacob, who at first thought that the money was put into the sacks with a malicious purpose, is now disposed to put a milder interpretation upon the matter. In things doubtful, men are disposed to come to that conclusion which makes most for their peace of mind. They make an effort to think that to be true which they wish to be true.

No man of integrity will take an unrighteous advantage of the mistakes of those with whom he deals. Nothing is more palpably inconsistent with the great rule of doing to other men as you would that they should do unto you. Besides, it would have been very unsafe for Jacob's sons to have taken advantage of an oversight in the present case. It might have confirmed the suspicions of the lord of Egypt. But it is *never* safe to do any injustice while God reigns in heaven.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 13. We learn gradually to submit to the greatest trial of all when it becomes a necessity.

Verse 14. This is like that of Esther, committing herself and her attempt to God, "If I perish, I perish," (Esther iv., 16); and like that of those saints in the Acts, "The will of the Lord be done." Jacob prays for Benjamin's safety, but will be content that his own will be crossed, so that God's will may be accomplished. This is the right way of praying; this is to "draw near with a true heart." (Heb. x. 22).—(*Trapp.*)

It is too much in the desponding spirit of his former complaint. (Gen. xlii. 36). He looked too much at the secular, human side of the matter, and too little at the spiritual and divine side. When we are in the dark, why should we not rather expect deliverance than yield to despondence?—(*Jacobus*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 15–18.

JOSEPH'S BRETHREN UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF A GUILTY FEAR.

I. They dread some great misfortune. They are driven to Egypt by a dire necessity. A presentiment of disaster weighs upon their hearts. They expect no favourable solution of their mysterious treatment.

II. They are possessed by an inveterate spirit of mistrust. They interpret adversely even the most favourable appearances. The generous reception which was given them only serves to raise their worst suspicions and to alarm their fears. They cannot get rid of the belief that Joseph meant to entrap them by a cunning device.

III. They are haunted by the memory of an old crime. They are innocent respecting this money in their sacks, and yet they feel themselves to be guilty men. Conscience makes cowards of them everywhere. They dread that some mischievous plot is all the while preparing for their destruction. And why all this fear, since they knew that they were innocent of the only offence that could be charged against them? The true answer is, that they felt that they themselves were capable of a similar act of treachery. We dread the effects of that sin in others which has taken such a strong hold upon ourselves. The sense of having committed wrong makes us distrust even goodness itself, and we find fear where no fear is. The memory of sin depresses and spreads a gloom over our souls, so that we often misunderstand the gracious designs of Providence; and those things which in another state of mind would afford us relief and hope only bring us alarm and sorrow.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 15, 16. Joseph, looking upon them, beholds his brother Benjamin. It is likely his eyes would here be in some danger of betraying his heart; and that being conscious of this, he instantly gives orders to his steward to take these men home to his house, and prepare a dinner, for that they must dine with him at noon. By this means he would be able to compose himself, and to form a plan how to conduct, and in what manner to discover himself to them. See how fruitful love is of kind contrivance; seeking, and finding opportunities to gratify itself by closer and closer interviews. Thus when two of John's disciples were kindly asked, "What seek ye?" they answered, "Master, where *dwellest* thou?" as if they should say, "We want to be better acquainted with thee, and to say more than could be said in this public place." And thus when Jesus himself would commune with his disciples, He saith unto them, "Children, come and dine."—(*Fuller.*)

Verse 17. Had he not known the deference due from servants to their masters, he would probably have desired to know the reason for so strange a proceeding; why the governor made such a difference between those men and the many thousands of strangers who came to the country to buy corn.—(*Bush*).

Verse 18. It was incredible that such a man as the Governor of Egypt, whose character for probity was very high, should invite men to his house with the intention of taking advantage of them and of robbing them of their asses, or of making them slaves. But in their present state of mind they scarcely knew what other construction to put upon it; so unhappy a thing it is to have guilt lying on the conscience, it deadens the enjoyments of life and embitters its sorrows; it raises fearful apprehensions on the slightest occasions; and continually arrays the Most High in an aspect of wrath. If we wish to be happy let us seek the removal of that never-failing source of misery.—(*Bush*).

When sinners refuse to be comforted, then they are forced to remember God and be troubled. (Psa. lxxvii. 2, 3).

As every body hath its shadow, so hath every sin its fear; and fear torment. (1 John iv. 18).—(*Trapp*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 19–25

JOSEPH'S STEWARD.

This incident shows how the spirit of Joseph's character had been imparted to his subordinate. This steward was influenced by his master for good, and some traces of that influence are here manifest:

I. He listens patiently to the explanation of their conduct, offered by Joseph's brethren. In all Joseph's treatment of his brethren in Egypt up to this point, there was nothing arbitrary or unkind. It was throughout justified by the circumstances, as they appeared. Joseph was always ready to listen to reason, and to give due consideration to any explanation that might be offered. He was considerate and patient towards these suspicious men in giving them time to clear themselves. This steward reflected so much of his master's character that he was also considerate and patient in his treatment of these men. The circumstances were suspicious, and they felt that their conduct needed an explanation. He listened to them in the spirit of a just and merciful man. Most men of his class are full of the insolence of office; but here was a man of a better sort, and chiefly made such, as we have reason to believe, through the good influence of his master.

II. He treats them with a wise kindness, and with piety. 1. *With a wise kindness.* He does not seek further to increase their fears, but hastens to relieve them. He was more merciful than to stretch them any longer on the rack of suspense, and too wise to inflict pain when no good end could be served thereby. To give them hope and confidence he brings Simeon out unto them, who being released, as they must well know, by Joseph's order, would be a proof to them that all was well. 2. *With piety.* He assures them that all the strange things which had lately happened to them were ordered and guided by God's providence. (Verse 23.) He had the acknowledgment of their money, and they must regard it as the gift of God. No charge could now be brought against them, and this relief to their anxiety they must regard also as the gift of God. In this steward we have an instance of a man whose character had been moulded by another. We have no doubt that Joseph had spoken to him concerning the God of his fathers, and thus he learnt the sentiments and language of his pious master. Many have received religious truths and convictions from those placed over them, from those who used their influence and authority to spread the knowledge and the fear of God. Such a strong character as Joseph's would be sure to impress itself upon all who came under its gracious influence.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 19, 20. They were afraid of sharing the fate of Simeon, or of being made slaves. They lost no time, therefore, in explaining their own behaviour and notifying misapprehension, if any existed, in the minds of Joseph and his servants. The richest feast will afford little gratification to a troubled mind. —(*Bush*).

Verse 22. "We cannot tell." It was a wise discretion to speak thus, for it might have exposed them to great risk to utter the suspicion which lurked in their minds. Besides, they did not know, and it was better, therefore, to acknowledge their ignorance at once. They had a theory, but it was neither safe nor expedient to make it known.

Often circumstances may be such as to throw grave suspicion upon good men. Therefore it is of the utmost importance to have a well-established character which shall avail for a man's defence when unjust suspicion has fixed upon him. Here also appears the disadvantage of a bad character, that such an one is suspected of wrong doing even when he is not guilty. Besides, these men feel that they have a bad record with their own conscience, and "a guilty conscience needs no accuser." Trust in God is the chief confidence in such a dark hour. (Psa. xxxvii.)—(*Jacobus*).

Verse 23. How perfectly comforting that this officer of Egypt's dreaded lord acknowledges the God of the Hebrews, and recognises Him as the God of these brothers and of their fathers. What a rebuke to their lack of faith. Why should they have been so slow to see His hand in thus supplying them with corn without money and without price? Here again is our New Testament Joseph, who will have no money for what He has to give, but gives it all freely and of grace, and on no other terms, to whosoever will.—(*Jacobus*).

"The feeble-minded" must be comforted (1 Thess. v. 14); not crushed, or cashiered, as the wounded deer is by the whole herd. David, in the spirit of prophecy, pronounceth a bitter curse upon those that "persecuteth him whom God hath smitten, and talked to the grief of those whom He had wounded." (Psa. lxix. 26). Joseph's steward had learned better things of his master.—(*Trapp*).

Verses 24, 25. Joseph would be at home at the dining hour of noon, from his public and official duties, and they will be prepared to meet him with a gift especially because of the *glad tidings* that they were to *eat bread* there. Jesus has spread a table for us, and anointed our head with generous oil, and made our cup run over, and chiefly He has spread His own sacramental table, and will sup with us, and we with Him. Well may we bring presents. He will take as purchase-money for His provisions of grace no pay for the Bread of Life. But He will receive our grateful offerings of praise, and with such sacrifices God is well pleased.—(*Jacobus.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 26–34.

JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN AT THE BANQUET.

Consider this incident:—**I. As it illustrates some useful principles of social life.** 1. *That we should not set up the pretence of loving all alike.* When Joseph thus liberally provided for these men he intended it to be a feast of brotherhood, and yet he made a marked difference between them. His brother Benjamin was specially honoured (verse 34), and greeted with loving words. (Verse 29). All were not treated alike. The possession of an universal love—a love which does not discriminate is an unreality, a mere sentiment, and nothing more. We should not say that Benjamin, who has offended little and loved much should only receive the same as the rest. Surely those who are most like Christ are the most dear to God, and, therefore, these should be held the most dear to all who are the children of God. 2. *That it is wise to observe the established customs of society when they are not morally wrong.* In this feast differences of rank were respected, established social customs were not broken through. The Hebrews sat at a table by themselves, the Egyptians also by themselves. Joseph occupied a separate table by himself, for he was governor, and, therefore, of superior rank to the other Egyptians. (Verse 32.) Egyptian customs demanded such an arrangement. The equality of Christian brotherhood is quite consistent with this state of things. Christianity teaches principles that tend to make man equal, but in the meantime it does not rudely attack established customs which have a natural propriety in their favour. The pure and elevated principles of Christ's religion are under present disadvantage in contending with the imperfections of human nature. But they shall prevail in the end, not by declaring a war of extermination against social customs which are not perfect, but by raising and ennobling the idea and the true purpose of life. It was thus that slavery was uprooted in the early ages of the Christian Church; not by declaiming directly against it, but by teaching those principles, which, if they prevailed, would render slavery impossible.

II. As it illustrates the secret and the outward life. 1. *In the case of the brethren.* Everything outwardly now tended to make them happy. The suspicious circumstances had been cleared up. They had the assurance that those with whom they were dealing feared God. They were treated with a generous hospitality. Joseph sustains throughout the character of an Egyptian nobleman. But he is more than this, he is a tender and considerate man. He remembers what they had said about a venerable old man, and not satisfied with asking in general of their welfare, he adds, "Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?" (Verse 27.) He is moved to tenderness at the sight of Benjamin's youth. (Verse 29.) Thus they were received with kindness, indulged with feasting, and their outward circumstances were such as would render them happy. Yet with all this they had no peace, for the deep foundations of it had not yet been laid in the reconciliation of enmities, and in the complete healing of the past. In the midst of outward enjoyment, they must have felt a conflict of painful emotions within. The conduct of Joseph was, after all, strange and perplexing. They could not help wondering what it all meant. They had their fears. The secret and the outward life are also illustrated. 2. *In the case of Joseph.* In this conference with his brethren Joseph was getting on tender ground, and could only with difficulty control his feelings. (Verse 30). Think of the scene in his chamber, and how he tries to obliterate the traces of it afterwards. (Verse 31). He was one man in that chamber, and quite another man in the banqueting room. How great is the difference between the man whom God sees and the man whom the world sees! In human life we have sometimes this double part to play, weeping in the chamber and refraining ourselves below. Joseph had secretly indulged in a sorrow which he could not reveal. There are occasions of sorrow in which we have no need to disguise our feelings, and for these we can find comfort in the sympathy of others. But there are secret sorrows which we must disguise. Such are often *the sorrows of the affections.* Joseph could not yet declare himself to his brethren, and yet all the while his heart was consuming itself with love. How much anguish in families is often felt on account of love unreturned or unregarded. There are also secret sorrows arising from *our anxiety concerning the souls of others.* A parent's anxiety about the spiritual state of a favourite son, wilful disobedience in children, signs of incipient intemperance in husband or wife; and yet, in the midst of all, the face is constrained to wear a smile, and may not tell the tale. There are also *spiritual sorrows which are personal.* They arise from a sense of imperfection, from the thought of blessings yet unattained. These are the sorrows of the purest and holiest of men, and may not be made known to the stranger. *Joseph's conduct was mysterious to his brethren, but his secret life, had they known it, would explain all.* And so many strange characteristics and habits in others might be thus explained. That irritability of temper, that irregularity of spirits, that heaviness, that sullen silence—these might be well accounted for if we only knew all. This fact of human nature should teach us *to judge tenderly and considerately of others.* Some consuming care, or inward trouble, or self-reproach, some sorrow of the mind we know not of, may account for all that which seems to us so strange. Even where there is outward cheerfulness the chamber may have a sad tale to tell of weeping, watching, doubt, and fear. Jesus bore our griefs and carried our sorrows; and we should learn to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 26. This was an exact fulfilment of one of his early dreams, when the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down before him. But Joseph was now changed; he had been too much saddened by misfortune, and was far too much accustomed to Egyptian homage to find any real pleasure in this, from which he had formerly expected so much. For us this is a pregnant example of the illusiveness of human life. Now that his dream was fulfilled to the very letter, he could not enjoy it. That thing which he had seen before in the prophetic visions of youth, that thing he had got; and now the joy of it was not in that, in the superiority, but in quite other circumstances. So it is we live, looking to an horizon which we reach but cannot enjoy, in which we find not what we expected. And yet observe here the merciful arrangement of God, who thus leads us on. Could we now count the cost of the things we hope for, would it be possible to live?—(*Robertson*).

Verses 27–29. Observe Joseph's relief in the indirect utterance of his feelings. He asked, "Is your father yet alive, and your youngest brother?" etc. Here is a strange principle of our nature, the necessity of utterance, either by a direct or by an indirect channel. Thus, criminal feeling must find for itself either direct expression in confession, or in speaking of the deed as committed by another.—(*Robertson.*)

They answer very properly, and call their father *his servant*, and again make obeisance. Thus, in them, Jacob himself bowed down to Joseph; and thereby that part of his dream was also fulfilled.—(*Fuller*).

Verse 30. After uttering a benediction which, under the disguise of a good wish from a stranger, was in reality the effusion of a bursting heart, he was obliged to retire in order to throw a veil over those feelings which must otherwise have betrayed the secret that for the present he designs to keep. He withdraws, therefore, to give vent to his tears in a private place; and however bitter were the tears which he had formerly shed when exiled from all that was dear to him on earth, he now sheds tears of joy of proportionable sweetness; his grief for what was past was now swallowed up in the ecstacy of what was present and what was to come.—(*Bush*).

Verse 31. We love Joseph for the warm sensibility of his heart, and we respect him as one who knows both when and where to weep, and who could refrain himself and appear cheerful when it was fit. While tears shed on proper occasions throw a grace over the manliest character, yet there is not only "a time to weep, but also a time to laugh; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing," and that he whose tears are not in some measure under the control of his judgment, is rather a child than a man.—(*Bush*).

Verses 32–34. It was now Joseph's wish to discover himself to his brethren, or rather to enable them to discover him. While they were at dinner, three things tend to this end, and were designed for it. (1) The order of the tables. The design of this was to set them a thinking of him, and who he was, or could be? That the Egyptians and Hebrews should eat apart, they could easily account for: but who, or what is this man? Is he not an Egyptian? Yet, why eat by himself? Surely he must be a foreigner. (2) The order in which they themselves were seated. Every man was placed "according to his age." But who can this be that is acquainted with their ages, so as to be able to adjust things in this order? Surely it must be some one who knows us though we know not him. Or is he a diviner? They are said to have "marvelled one at another," and well they might. (3) The peculiar favour which he expressed to Benjamin, in sending him a mess five times more than the rest. This was a manner of showing special favour in those times. It was therefore saying in effect, "I not only know all your ages, but towards that young man I have more than a common regard. Look at all this, and look at me. Look at me, my brother Benjamin. Dost thou not know me?" But all was hid from them. Their eyes, like those of the disciples towards their Lord, seem to have been holden that they should not know him.—(*Fuller*).

And now he feasts with them whom he formerly threatened, and turns their fear into wonder. All unequal love is not partial; all the brethren are entertained bountifully, but Benjamin hath a five-fold portion.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

Our New Testament Joseph bids us sit at the table which He has richly furnished in His house. He anoints our head with oil in token of honourable reception, and our cup runneth over. (Psa. xxiii. 5).—(*Jacobus*).

1. The banquet of Joseph's joy, of his hope, of his trying watch. 2. The feast of reviving hope in Joseph's brethren. 3. Their participation without envy in the honouring of Benjamin 4. An introduction to the last trial, and a preparation for it. 5. The successful issue in the fearful proving of Israel's sons.—(*Lange.*)

CHAPTER XLIV.

Critical Notes.—5. **Whereby indeed he divineth.**] "The ancient Egyptians, and still more the Persians, practised a mode of divination from goblets. Small pieces of gold and silver, together with precious stones marked with strange figures and signs, were thrown into the vessel, after which certain incantations were pronounced, and the evil demon was invoked; the latter was then supposed to give the answer, either by intelligible words, or by pointing to some of the characters on the precious stones, or in some other more mysterious manner. Sometimes the goblet was filled with pure water, upon which the sun was allowed to play; and the figures thus formed, or which a lively imagination fancied it saw, were interpreted as the desired omen. The goblets were usually of a spherical form; and from this reason, as well as because they were believed to teach man all natural and many supernatural things, they were called 'celestial globes.'" *(Kalisch.)* "The word rendered *divineth (nichesh)* means to hiss like a serpent *(nachash)*, and hence to murmur incantations." *(Alford.)*—21. That I may set mine eyes upon him.] An expression meaning the exercising of a tender care towards him. Thus (Jer. xxix. 12.) "Take him, and *look well to him*, and do him no harm." Heb. "*Set thine eyes upon him.*"

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–15.

The Final Trial of Joseph's Brethren.

I. The severity of the trial. 1. *It was unexpected.* They had been feasted, laden with corn, and sent prosperously on their journey. Simeon is restored, Benjamin is safe, and they were now rejoicing in the prospect of seeing their father and of gladdening his heart. But a dark cloud suddenly comes over their sky. They are overtaken, accused of a crime, in their case most heartless and ungenerous. Evidence is found against them which they are unable to gainsay. (Verses 6–13.) This was all unexpected, but still there had always lain deep in them a dread of some impending evil. Judah felt that this calamity was a judgment for former sins. The general wickedness of life, and especially their grievous sin against Joseph was now brought home to them. (Verse 16). 2. *It exposed them to the agony of suspense between hope and fear.* The searching for the cup began with the eldest, and as it proceeded, ten out of the eleven were found to be innocent, being acquitted by the fact. But alas! in the sack of the youngest the cup is found. Thus their hopes were raised within one step of acquittal, and then were suddenly and cruelly cast down. And as if to make their situation still more grievous and perplexing, suspicion falls upon one of their number who could least of all have done this deed. 3. *They were conscious of innocence.* They felt so clear of this guilt that they boldly challenged proof. (Verses 7–9). They plead their honesty in a former case. (Verse 8). They considered themselves safe in the conviction that their character was established. The property was found upon Benjamin and though that damaging fact admitted of no answer, yet they were placed in the painful position that they could not defend him without reflecting upon his accusers. They cannot believe Benjamin guilty, and yet they cannot attempt any defence. 4. *The trial touched them in the sorest place.* He who is accused of this guilt is the very son whom their father charged them to bring safely back. The calamities which now fell upon them seem to have been managed with the most cruel ingenuity. 5. *The bringing them into their present difficulty seemed to have the sanction of religion.* Though innocent in this particular instance, they could not help feeling somehow that their present misfortune was a judgment against them. Joseph professes to be able to discover the guilty by a supernatural knowledge. (Verse 15). They have some fear that an agency of this kind was at work against them. They must now have thought of a former scene when though guilty they escaped punishment, and though they now feel that in this present matter they are innocent, yet vengeance still cries aloud against them and demands reprisals. 6. *They regard their case as hopeless.* They are horror-struck. "They rent their clothes," which is the expression of a sorrow that knows no remedy.

II. The purpose of the trial. It was only some good and gracious design that could justify Joseph in putting his brethren to such a grievous trial as this.

That design may be easily read in the light of former and subsequent events. 1. *To stir up their consciences to the depths.* In this way alone could they be brought to true repentance. The process was severe, but it had its motive in that real and true kindness which wounds but to heal. They had been guilty of a great sin against Joseph, and he generously forgave it, but he wanted to bring their sin home to them for the healing of their souls. They must be completely humbled. Judah's acknowledgment shows that this desired result was accomplished. (Verse 16). Their sin in selling Joseph completely overwhelms them now. Joseph prolonged the sufferings of his brethren even after he had forgiven their sin. And so, when God forgives, some penalty still may remain. In all this we have a parable of our kinsman Redeemer, who bring us, by painful means, to a sense of our sin in order that He might be the more welcome when He reveals Himself as a Saviour. 2. *To show whether they were capable of receiving forgiveness.* Would they now desert Benjamin, their father's darling, as they had once deserted Joseph being such also? Or would they defend him and keep their trust? This was the true proof of them. And well did they endure the test. Judah comes boldly to the front and declares his purpose to cleave to his brother, and if needs be to sink with him in the same calamity. (Verse 16). When Benjamin came not the first time, Joseph may have suspected that he had been disposed of as himself had been. Therefore he contrived that Benjamin should be brought before him. And now he has to learn how Benjamin was treated by his brothers. Their feeling towards him was tested by the cup in the sack. Joseph found that his brethren did not believe in Benjamin's guilt, that they had a forgiving spirit. Had it been otherwise they would have been unfit to receive pardon. This is what our Lord teaches in the parable of the unmerciful servant. (St. Matt. xviii. 21–35).

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1, 2. As every measure which Joseph had yet taken to lead his brethren to discover who he was had failed, he must now have recourse to another expedient to detain them. All this is love, but it is love still working in a mysterious way. The object seems to be to *detain* Benjamin, and to *try* the rest.—(*Fuller*).

His desire was to find his brethren disposed to defend Benjamin in a just cause from that oppression to which he seemed to be exposed.—(*Bush*).

Had he presently entertained and embraced them as his brethren, they would sooner have gloried in their wickedness than repented of it. Neither would a little repentance serve for a sin so ingrained, and such a long time lain in. Some men's stains are so inveterate that they will hardly be got out till the cloth be almost rubbed to pieces. —(*Trapp*).

Verse 3. The most beautiful morning may soon be overcast with dark clouds. Joseph was preparing for them grief and fear, although he intended good and not harm. Let us never be too confident that to-morrow will be as this day, or that this day will be serene and bright till the evening.—(*Bush*).

Verses 4, 5. The use of the term "divineth" by the steward does not imply that Joseph ordinarily made use of the diviner's art; but as it had probably been *attributed* to him on account of his great wisdom, by the Egyptians, he merely takes advantage of the fact to accomplish a particular purpose, without leaving us any ground to infer that the popular impression was either true or false. It is probable that the steward alluded to the circumstances that occurred the day before. It is natural to suppose that he would have had this cup before him on that occasion; and as he appeared to discern their relative superiority by some supernatural means, we may easily conceive that the steward's phrase would convey to them the impression that it was owing to some mysterious magical virtue in the cup. We have no need to resort to any of the various renderings which have been suggested in order to save the credit of Joseph as an upright man. It was certainly as harmless a device as that of his feigning to be a stranger to his brethren, and keeping them so long in ignorance of his real character.—(*Bush*).

Verse 6. The steward had faith in his master, though he could not discern his purpose; believed in his justice and wisdom, though the command might be perplexing. So are we to learn to trust our New Testament Joseph, even where we cannot trace Him.

Verses 7, 8. Their consciences being clear they had a ready and immediate defence. 1. The very thought was abhorrent to them. "God forbid," or Heb. "Far be it from thy servants." They could not be so base or ungrateful to one who had treated them with such kindness, and had given them such an honoured place at his table. 2. They appeal to their proved honesty in a former instance. The uprightness of their character was well established, so that they could produce it as a witness in their favour when falsely accused.

Verse 9. Jacob's sons could confide in one another. They were so confident in one another's integrity that they could risk their own liberty upon it. They unanimously doomed the thief and themselves to slavery if he was found among their numbers; yet they were doubtless too rash in proffering to subject themselves to such a penalty. The money which they had formerly found in the mouth of their sacks might have taught them that the cup in question might likewise have been put into the sack of one of them without any fault on his part. He that is hasty with his tongue often rueth.—(*Bush*).

Innocency is bold, but withal had need to be wise, for fear of further inconvenience.—(*Trapp*).

Verse 10. The steward takes the sons of Jacob at their word, so far only as justice allowed. He will not punish the innocent with the guilty, nor the guilty so rigourously as they proposed. When others speak rashly, we ought not to take advantage of their rashness, for we ourselves have, no doubt, often come under engagements without due deliberation, of which others, if they had been disposed, might have availed themselves greatly to our injury.—(*Bush*).

Verses 11–13. When God comes to turn the bottom of the bag upwards, all will be out. Sin not, therefore, in hope of secrecy; at the last day all packs shall be opened.—(*Trapp.*)

In very agony they rend their clothes, reload their beasts, and return into the city. As they walk along, their thoughts turn upon another event; an event which had more than once occurred to their remembrance already. "It is the Lord! We are wanderers: and though we have escaped human detection, yet Divine vengeance will not suffer us to live."—(*Fuller.*)

Verses 14, 15. They can only wait in humble posture to hear what is said to them. "Thus," says an ancient father, "they bow down to him whom they sold into slavery, *lest* they should bow down to him."—(*Bush.*)

Joseph does not profess to divine. He only claims this prerogative for such an one as he, and refers to his supernatural knowledge as being manifest in the case such as they were wont to attribute to diviners.—(*Jacobus.*)

The existence of a divining cup in Joseph's house shows us that he had given way to Egyptian superstition; and therefore those commentators who desire to make Joseph appear blameless have endeavoured to give a meaning to this word "divining" which it will not bear. But we must remember that Joseph and the other saints of the Old Testament all belonged to ages before, and not after, Christ. They were before their generations, or they would not have been saints; but not before all generations, or they would have been more than saints.—(*Robertson.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 16-34.

JUDAH'S INTERCESSION.

There are some remarkable features in this intercession—

I. It was able. Judah was the man of eloquence among his brethren. His eloquence proposed and carried out the measure of Joseph's sale, prevailed on Jacob to send Benjamin with the rest to Egypt; and now it persuades and overcomes this unknown Joseph who cannot endure any longer the restraint which he put upon himself.. Judah confines himself to facts, but arranges them in the best order for effect. They are all speaking facts, each one has a tender memory or sorrow of its own. They suggest so much to the hearer that the whole speech is fired with the passion of true eloquence. Kalisch justly calls this pleading speech of Judah's, "one of the masterpieces of Hebrew composition." The facts narrated are simple, but they are told with the true touches of nature. What fiction can surpass the pathos of verse 20? "And we said unto my lord, we have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age; a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him."

II. It was noble. He does not insist upon the innocence of Benjamin, nor does he confess the theft; but acknowledges the general iniquity of his life. He generously offers himself as a surety for Benjamin. This heroic and self-sacrificing deed speaks louder than any words. He accepts slavery in his brother's stead. Here was an appeal to Joseph's sense of a self-forgetting devotion. In Judah there were many faults, and yet we find in him fond love for his father, and compassion for a brother stronger than even the desire of life.

III. It gave promise of future greatness. In sacred history, Judah's name becomes great, is associated with all that is strong and noble. He is the *pleader*, "Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah." (Deut. xxxiii. 7.) "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah." (Gen. xlix. 10.) David was chosen to be king of the tribe of Judah. (Psa. lxxviii. 67, 68.)

IV. It suggests some features of our Lord's intercession for us. Judah was a type of Christ. "Our Lord sprang out of Judah." (Heb. vii. 14.) He was "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." (Rev. v. 5.) His human ancestor was a remarkable type of Him, of His power, His wisdom, His triumphs, His pre-eminence. A type also, as here, of His *intercession.* Christ appears in the presence of God for us. He "maketh intercession for us." (Rom. viii. 34.) He bears the curse that would otherwise fall upon us. Though Himself the birthright son, He bears the cross that we, the humblest and the least, might be free.

V. It suggests the qualities of true prayer. In true prayer the soul is stirred to its depths. "I would give very much," says Luther, "if I could pray to our Lord God as well as Judah prays to Joseph here; for it is a perfect specimen of prayer—the true feeling that there ought to be in prayer"

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 16. They well knew that they had sold Joseph for a slave, and filled up many of the years of their father's life with bitter anguish; and they admit that it were a righteous thing with God to make them all slaves for crimes which their consciences charged upon them, but of which they supposed Joseph to be profoundly ignorant.—(*Bush.*)

An ingenuous and penitent confession, joined with self-loathing and self-judging; teaching us how to confess to God.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 17. This was to try the truth of their love to Benjamin, and whether they would stick to him in his utmost peril. God hath like ends in afflicting His children. "The King of Babylon stood at the parting-way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination." (Ezek. xxi. 21.) So doth God. He knows that the best divining of men is at the parting-way; there every dog will show to what master he belongs.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 18. He asks the privilege of speaking a word.

> "Say, what is prayer, when it is prayer indeed?
> The mighty utterance of a mighty need."

He begs that the lord's anger may not burn against him. He is in his power; the evidence is against him. But he will press his suit, if possible to get a hearing. He owns the royal authority which he addresses; but he must tell the facts in some faint hope of prevalence.—(*Jacobus.*)

The surety here becomes the advocate, and presents one of the most powerful pleas ever uttered. Though he knew nothing of the schools or the rules of the rhetoricians, yet no orator ever pronounced a more moving oration. His good sense, and his affection for his venerable father, taught him the highest strains of eloquence.—(*Bush.*)

This brief introduction was admirably calculated to soften resentment, and obtain a patient hearing. The respectful title given him, "my lord;" the entreaty for permission to "speak;" the intimation that it should be but as it were "a word;" the deprecation of his anger, as being in a manner equal to that of "Pharaoh;" and all this prefaced with an interjection of sorrow, as though nothing but the deepest distress should have induced him to presume to speak on such a subject, showed him to be well qualified for his undertaking.—(*Fuller.*)

Verses 19–29. It is observable that Judah said nothing but what was true, although he did not tell all the truth. It was not to be expected that he would tell how Benjamin's brother was lost. He only told his father's opinion concerning it, and that was enough to melt any man's heart into compassion for a father bereaved in such a cruel manner of one son, and trembling in apprehension of the loss of another.—(*Bush.*)

Verses 30–34. The whole of this intercession, taken together, is not one twentieth part of the length which our best advocates would have made of it in a court of justice; yet the speaker finds room to *expatiate* upon those parts which are the most tender, and on which a minute description will heighten the general effect. We are surprised, delighted, and melted with his charming parenthesis: "Seeing his life is bound up with the lad's life." It is also remarkable how he *repeats* things which are the most tender; as, "when I come, *and the lad be not with us* . . . . . it shall come to pass, when he seeth that *the lad is not with us*" . . . . So also in describing the effect which this would produce: "When he seeth that the lad is not with us, *he will die;* and we shall bring down the grey hairs of thy servant, my father, *with sorrow to the grave.* And now, having stated his situation, he presumes to express his *petition.* His withholding that to the last was holding the mind of his judge in a state of affecting suspense, and preventing the objections which an abrupt introduction of it at the beginning might have created. Thus Esther, when presenting her petition to Ahasuerus, kept it back till she had, by holding him in suspense, raised his desire to the utmost height to know what it was, and induced in him a predisposition to grant it. And when we consider his petition, and the filial regard from which it proceeds, we may say, that if we except the grace of another and greater Substitute, never surely was there a more generous proposal!—*(Fuller.)*

CHAPTER XLV.

Critical Notes.—6. Earring.] *To ear* in the Anglo-Saxon means *to plough*. The word is used in this sense in Ex. xxxiv. 12; Deut. xxi. 4.—**8. A father to Pharaoh.**] "Second author of life to him." (*Murphy.*) "Most confidential counsellor and friend." (*Keil.*) So Haman is styled a second *father* to Artaxerxes. (Esther xiii. 6.) Also in 1 Macc. xi. 32, King Demetrius writes to his *father* Lasthenes.—**10. The land of Goshen.**] Otherwise called (Gen. xlvii. 11) "the land of Rameses." "It was to the east of the Nile, as lying nearest to the immigrants from Canaan; and neither at this time, nor in the history of the exodus, do we hear of any crossing of the river. But it must have extended to the Nile—witness the hiding of the infant Moses, and the regrets for the fish which they used to eat in Egypt. (Num. xi. 5.) The LXX. render the word used here and in ch. xlvii. 35, by "Gesen of Arabia; and we know from Herodotus and Strabo that the ancients reckoned the Eastern cities of Egypt, Heliopolis and Herroopolis, as in Arabia. So that it was to the north-east of Egypt, where even now is the most fertile part, and in the neighbourhood of the capital, where Joseph dwelt." (*Alford.*)—**12. My mouth that speaketh unto you.**] He speaks no longer by an interpreter, but by his own lips and in their native tongue.—**20. Regard not your stuff.**] Houses, or pieces of furniture which must be left behind. The word is literally *your utensils*, articles of household use.—**21. Joseph gave them waggons.**] Two-wheeled cars, fit for driving over a rough country, where roads were not found. Wheeled vehicles are scarcely seen in Palestine.—**24. See that ye fall not out by the way.**] Some maintain that the sense is, "Be not afraid." They were not to be in dread lest any after-plot of his should bring them back again. The Heb. word means, to be stirred by any passion, whether of fear or anger; and is interpreted in the sense of quarrelling, or falling out, in Prov. xxix. 9; Isa. xxviii. 21. The word is so rendered here, and it best suits the sense. Onkelos gives to it the same signification, "Do not contend."—**26. And Jacob's heart fainted.** "*Fainted* is perhaps literally, *remained cold*." He had too much experience of deceit to believe easily a strange tale like this. (*Alford.*)—**27. The spirit of Jacob their father revived.**] "Warmth and life returned to his spirit." (*Alford.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-15.

JOSEPH MADE KNOWN TO HIS BRETHREN.

Joseph's brethren would be naturally anxious while Judah was so eloquently pleading. Powerful and tender as that speech was, they must have trembled as to the issue; for they could not help regarding all their calamities as a most righteous judgment of God upon them. Benjamin would feel most acutely for his afflicted father who is destined to suffer another bereavement, and for his brother who is about to give himself up for him. But how does their judge, all this time, stand affected? All depends upon the temper in which he listens to the appeal, upon the end which he has in view. But Joseph was now to be made known to his brethren. In this discovery, mark—

I. The ripeness of the time. The great object of Joseph, in all his dealings with his brethren had now been gained. They were brought to a bitter sense of their sin. Their sorrow for the past was deep and overwhelming. They were in the penitent state, and were now prepared for forgiveness and blessing. Now that the end had been gained, to lengthen out their trial any further would have been both a cruel and useless experiment. We are prepared for the grace of Christ by the sorrows and discipline of repentance. He will not prolong our trial further than is necessary for us, but will reveal His mercy at our worst moment, when we are ready to believe that all is lost. After our greatest trials, when we have toiled all night and caught nothing, even at the fourth watch, He will come walking on the wave and will stand on the shore and reveal Himself. (John xxi. 7.) We value God's mercy most when we are made to see the awful depth of our sin.

II. His delicacy of feeling. "He cried, cause every man to go out from me: and there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren." (Verse 1.) The deepest and tenderest feelings of the heart are not to be exposed to strangers. Hence all such witnesses of his emotion were to be put away. There are some who love to expose their feelings to others, who express their various emotions without reserve. They feel a sense of luxury in the display of grief. But the greatest and most exalted minds shrink from thus vulgarizing their feelings. They respect the sacredness of human sorrow. Our Lord, who took our human nature upon Him, and who was the highest example of that nature, did not announce His deepest truths and feelings to the multitude, but reserved them for his disciples.

III. His entire forgiveness. Now that he is about to forgive he does not chide them for their past conduct. He will not spoil the gift by his manner of giving. It shall be like the gifts of God, "liberally" and without "upbraiding." (James i. 5.) The completeness and the gracefulness of Joseph's forgiveness may be gathered from these two considerations:—1. *He strives to prevent remorse.* He hastens to preserve them from sinking into the lowest possible deep of misery at the remembrance of the past. "Be not grieved," he says "nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither." (Verse 5.) He will not allow them to fall into that state of remorse in which true penitence is impossible. He will prevent despair by leading them away from themselves and from self-reproaches, so that they might see and enjoy the mercy which was prepared for them. 2. *He bids them see in their past history the plan of God.* "For God did send me before you to preserve life." (Verse 5.) Throughout all the dark and evil things of their history the hand of God was manifest. Providence, even by such strange means, was working out redemption. God had a saving purpose in view. All those things of which they were most afraid had been allowed to happen to them to further this benevolent design—"to preserve life." The end of the Lord is salvation, however strange the means by which that end is brought about. God brings good out of evil, and these men were but instruments in His hands. The actors in this history had no plan. They knew not whither all these strange things were tending. Even Joseph himself did not know one step before him. "There is a danger in the too easy acquiesence in the fact that good comes from evil; for we begin to say, evil is then God's agent, to do evil must be right, and so we are landed in confusion. Before this had taken place, had Joseph's brethren said, 'out of this good will come, let us sell our brother,' they would have been acting against their conscience; but after the event it was but faith to refer it to God's intention. Had they done this before, it would have been presumption. But to feel that good has come through you, but not by your will, is humiliating. You feel that the evil is all yours, and the good is God's."—(*Robertson.*)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Now at length all the love, which during twenty-two long years had been pent up in Joseph's breast bursts forth with irrepressible might. -(*De Sola.*)

No more can Jesus refrain himself in the extreme afflictions of His brethren. (Isa. xlii. 14.) For he is a very tender-hearted Joseph, and though He speak roughly to His brethren, and handle them hardly, yea, and threaten grievous bondage to His best beloved Benjamin, yet can He not contain Himself from weeping with us, and upon us.—(*Trapp.*)

He does not choose to have any spectators to the tender scene before him, except those who were to be the actors in it. The heart does not like to have its stronger emotions exposed to the view of many witnesses. Moreover, had his servants been present, they must soon have learned what treatment Joseph once received from his brethren; and it was not to be expected that they would so easily forgive the injuries done to their lord as their lord himself could do. Joseph, with his characteristic generosity, determines at once to spare the feelings of his brethren and consult their reputation by having all spectators removed.—(*Bush.*)

That religious feeling which is never at a loss for appropriate words is a religion and a sensibility which has in it no depth. With deep truth we are told this in the parable of the sower and the seed. He cast his seed on the stony ground, and the seed sprang up rapidly, simply because there was no depth of earth. Therefore we learn from this that feeling, to be true and deep, must be condensed by discipline. —(*Robertson.*)

Many passions do not well abide witnesses, because they are guilty to their own weakness. Joseph sends forth his servants, that he might freely weep. He knew he could not say, "I am Joseph," without an unbeseeming vehemence.—(*Bp. Hall*).

Verse 2. It was the wicked brothers who should have filled the house with outcries and bitter groans of repentance. But it is Joseph who weeps in the presence of the transgressors. How our New Testament Joseph weeps at the grave of Lazarus to think of all the ravages which sin has made! Not your tears, sinner, but the tears and agonies of Jesus must avail for salvation.—(*Jacobus*).

Verse 3. He must now speak out in the plainest terms. *I am Joseph.* How this brief sentence goes to their heart, explains the mystery, fills them with awe and self-reproach, yet invites their confidence. How we are reminded of Saul of Tarsus when our New Testament Joseph reveals Himself to him. "Who art thou, Lord? I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." What shall Joseph now say? Shall he remind them of the pit, and the sale into slavery, to confound them utterly? No! He asks only, "*Doth my father yet live?*" This is to confess them as his brethren, by acknowledging their common father. So Jesus is not ashamed to call us *brethren*. (Heb. ii. 11). Only as a next step will Joseph refer to their wrong-doing, and then the rather to bid them not be grieved nor angry with themselves so as to keep them aloof from him with fear.—(*Jacobus*).

Those words, "I am Joseph," seemed to sound thus much to their guilty thoughts:—You are murderers, and I am a prince in spite of you. My power, and this place, give me all opportunities of revenge: my glory is your shame, my life your danger—your sin lives together with me. But now the tears and gracious words of Joseph have soon assured them of pardon and love, and have bidden them turn their eyes from their sin against their brother, to their happiness in him, and have changed their doubts into hopes and joys, causing them to look upon him without fear, yet not without shame. Actions salved up with a free forgiveness are as not done: and as a bone once broken is stronger after well setting, so is love after reconcilements.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

They could not answer him. *They were troubled at his presence.* So the sense of sin makes us dread the presence of God. We are confounded before Him, and know not what we shall say. Adam hides himself among the trees of the garden. Only the clear revelation of God's love to sinners can restore us to confidence and peace. That comfort which the Gospel brings is the only healing for our afflicted souls.

Wonder, doubt, reverence, fear, hope, guiltiness, joy, grief, struck them all at once. Shall it not be so with the Jews at their glorious conversion, when they shall hear, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom ye have persecuted and pierced?" (Zech. xii. 10; Rev. i. 7.)—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 4. How disposed to forget and bury their sin. He invites them to his free favour. So our Joseph in the Gospel bids us *come to Him.* This is the Gospel message, *Come unto Me.* This is the entreaty of love. He will have them approach more closely and come boldly that he may more fully reveal himself. They felt the power of this gracious word and *they came near.*—(*Jacobus.*)

I am Joseph, your brother. Their great transgressions had not broken the bonds of nature. Christ is "not ashamed to call us *brethren,*" though we have rendered ourselves unworthy by our manifold sins. Even in all his wandering, the prodigal was still a son.

Verse 5. Here is a lively image of Christ's love towards His enemies, for whom he prayed and died. This Angel of the Covenant first troubles the waters, and then cures those cripples that step in. This sun of Righteousness first draws up vapours of godly grief, and then dispels them.—(*Trapp.*)

A less delicate mind would have talked of forgiving them; but he entreats them to forgive themselves, as though the other was out of the question. Nor did he mean that they should abuse the doctrine of Providence to the making light of sin; but merely that they should eye the hand of God in all, so as to be reconciled to the event, though they might weep in secret for the part which they had acted. Their viewing things in this light would not abate their godly sorrow, but rather increase it. It would tend only to expel the sorrow of the world which worketh death.—(*Fuller.*)

The cross of Christ is an example, and the highest, of that Power above us which brings good out of evil. The murderers of Jesus only intended evil, and yet God by their means wrought out salvation. They were the unconscious instruments of His gracious will.

We shall ever find abundant cause of thanksgiving that a gracious God has counteracted the tendency of sin to produce the most misirable effects in ourselves and others, and preserved us from the pain of seeing misery diffused around us as the fruit of our doings. Yet for our humiliation let us remember that the nature of sin is not altered bv the use that God makes of it. Poison does not cease to be poison because it may enter into the composition of healing medicines.—(*Bush*).

The principles illustrated in Joseph's statement are these,—1. God's absolute control over all creatures and events. 2. That while sinners are encouraged to hope in His mercy, they are left without excuse for their sin. 3. That God orders all human affairs with a view to the preservation of His sacred and gifted family,—the Church.

Verses 6, 7.—Whatever might be the pressure of the famine, God designed not only to preserve the lives of those who then existed, but to preserve also a posterity in the earth for Abraham and Jacob. If Isaac had perished on Mount Moriah, what would have become of the promise to Abraham? If Jacob's sons had died of hunger, what would have become of the promise to Jacob, that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed? Let us learn from this to be thankful to God for those mercies to our fathers by which they were preserved from destruction. They were upheld for our sakes as well as their own.—(*Bush*).

That is the most rational view in all cases, especially in the dark dispensations of human life, not to halt at human causes, or stay there, but to look at God's ways, as Joseph does here; and to trace His leading, like a golden thread drawn through all the follies and errors of men.—(*Lange*).

Verse 8. Had such words as these been spoken by Joseph's brethren, we should justly have thought they were uttering a blasphemous lie by endeavouring to transfer their criminal conduct to God. Had thay said, "It was not we that sent you hither, but God," we might justly have pronounced them guilty of daring impiety; but when Joseph is the speaker, we recognise the drift of the words at once. His object was to intimate that his coming to Egypt was more God's work than theirs. Their intention was no doubt evil; but his thoughts were so much occupied with God's intentions, that he forgot theirs.—(*Bush*.)

God hides Himself behind human history, where only the eye of faith can discern Him.

Joseph ascribes his exaltation and prosperity to God. 1. He looks, beyond all *hindrances*, to God. Beyond the persecutions of his brethren to that Providence which has a purpose of good, even in things evil. 2. He looks, beyond all *human instruments*, to God. Pharaoh had been the means of his exaltation, but it was from God that he derived that knowledge and wisdom which gave him favour in the eyes of Pharaoh. 3. He accepts the position which God has given him. He was *a father to Pharaoh*,—in very deed, the second author of life to him. It is not a sin against humility to accept what God appoints for us. 4. He maintains the right disposition through all the changes of Providence. He bears his affliction with meekness, and his elevation with humility.

Verse 9. Better than abundance of corn is it, to be assured that the lord of the granaries is his son Joseph. How blessed to know from the Gospel that the dispenser of universal providence and the proprietor of the universe is our God, for ever and ever—that our elder brother is exalted at the right hand of the Majesty on high. And then the message *come down unto me—tarry not*. (So John xiv.) Faith in the Father and the Son is the cure for heart trouble. "I will surely come again to take you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also."—(*Jacobus*.)

Christ seems to send from heaven, and say unto us in like sort, God hath made me Lord of all; come up unto me, tarry not.—(*Trapp*.)

Verses 10, 11.—He already has a place prepared for the covenant *household*. The land of Goshen was the most fertile part of the land best suited for shepherds. The covenant household is now to be transferred to Egypt, for their development from a family to a nation. (Gen. xlvii. 11.)—(*Jacobus*.)

I will nourish thee. Joseph kept his word to the letter. (Gen. xlvii. 12.)

Verse 12. He appeals to their natural senses in proof of his identity. So our Joseph reveals Himself that we may not fail to recognise Him. *It is I*, be not afraid. (1.) Filial piety is beautiful. (2.) It is a shame to a son when he becomes exalted to despise and neglect his poor parents.—(*Jacobus*.)

The mercy of God to us, in Christ, is so great that we require the strongest evidence in order to believe it.

Verse 13. A lover of God takes pleasure in telling what God has done for him, that his friends may magnify the Lord with him. Joseph had, perhaps, another end in view in desiring his brethren to tell his father of his glory. This part of the message might give them the hope of finding forgiveness with their father. By hearing of Joseph's glory, he could perceive that God had sent him into Egypt by their hands to accomplish his prophetical dreams. The grace of

God, in giving such a favourable issue to Joseph's afflictions, would reconcile Jacob to the men who had brought those afflictions upon him.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 14. God's people are not senseless Stoics or flinty Nabals, but have natural affections in them.—(*Trapp*).

Verse 15. In the spirit of a fond brother, and not of an offended judge, he kisses all of them as well as Benjamin, and thus assures them of forgiveness more expressly than any laboured language could have done. They were emboldened to speak to him after this. After all our Joseph's assurances to us by word and deed in the gospel, by His loving life, and His living love, we may come boldly to the *throne*, seeing it is *the throne of grace*. Our Elder Brother, our Kinsman Redeemer is such an one as we need. Our Joseph will have us emboldened to talk with Him in prayer and communion.—(*Jacobus*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 16–20.

PHARAOH'S INVITATION TO JACOB AND HIS SONS.

Pharaoh invites Joseph's brethren and their father to dwell in his land. (Verses 17–20.)

I. This speaks well as to his delicate consideration for Joseph. He had reposed full confidence in Joseph, leaving to him the management of all his affairs. Joseph had already given orders that his father should be brought down to Egypt. (Verse 13.) He knew also that he was admitted so far into the confidence of his master that he could take this liberty. But Pharaoh, with great delicacy, wishes to spare Joseph's feelings in having to invite his own relations, as it were, to another man's house.

II. This shows the value he set upon Joseph. His invitation is accompanied with more liberal offers than those of his trusted servant. Joseph only desired them to bring all the property they had; but Pharaoh bids them disregard their household goods, as he himself would make for them an abundant and sufficient provision. (Verses 10–20.) The "good of all the land of Egypt" was theirs. Pharaoh will even have them brought to Egypt with all possible speed and comfort. He gives orders for waggons to fetch them. They could only have this favour by royal command, for it was strictly forbidden that waggons should be taken out of Egypt. His great liberality towards this family tells us how high Joseph was in his esteem. He wanted to express the gratitude of the nation to so great a benefactor.

III. This teaches us how great is the influence of character. Joseph's character had made a strong impression upon his master. We often say hard things concerning the ingratitude of human nature; but, after all, there is much gratitude yet to be found, even in this heartless world. Pharaoh had found Joseph faithful in all things, and, therefore, honoured and esteemed him. Such influence could not be gained by exalted position, or by mere authority, nor could it be commanded and enforced by law. It can only arise in consequence of that law of the human heart by which love begets love.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 16. They highly esteemed Joseph on his own account; and that he should prove to be a member of a respectable family, and have the pleasure of again meeting with his nearest relatives, were circumstances that afforded them a real gratification. —(*Murphy*)

The servants of princes are seldom disposed to look kindly upon those that are raised above themselves, especially if foreigners. Joseph's merits, indeed, were such that they could not but be universally acknowledged; yet the spirit which is in man lusteth so strongly to envy, that Joseph's continued good standing in the court of Pharaoh must be considered as a singularly good testimony to the wisdom and blamelessness of his deportment to all around him.—(*Bush*).

Verse 17. Pharaoh is good to Jacob and his house, for Joseph's sake; so is God to us and ours, for Jesu's sake.—(*Trapp*).

Verse 18. So saith Christ, "Come unto me, and ye shall find rest to your souls." (Matt. xi. 28). Say you meet with some trouble by the way, as haply Jacob had foul weather ere he came down to Egypt. What is a drop of vinegar put into an ocean of wine? No country hath more venemous creatures than Egypt, none more antidotes. So godliness, saith one, hath many troubles, and as many helps against trouble.—(*Trapp*).

Verse 19. This was a mode of travelling to which Jacob had been but little used. As at that day, so at the present, wheel carriages are almost wholly unknown in the country of Palestine.—(*Bush*).

Christ will send His waggons for us, His cherubins, and clouds to fetch us up to heaven at the last day (1 Thes. iv. 15), as they did Moses and Elias (Matt. xvii. 3). This David foresaw, and therefore envied not the pomp and state of those men of God's hand, that are whirled here up and down in waggons and chariots, etc. (Psa. xvii. 14, 15).—(*Trapp*).

Verse 20. Why should those who have all the riches of the better country before them give themselves any disquiet about the perishing things that belong to the earthly house of this tabernacle? The heirs of heaven are rich in the midst of poverty; although they have nothing, they possess all things. Never let them give less credit to the promises of their heavenly Father than Jacob's son gave to the King of Egypt.—(*Bush*).

Alexander, hearing of the riches of the Indies, divided his kingdom of Macedon among his captains and soldiers. And being asked what he had left for himself, he answered, Hope. And should not the hope of heaven make us slight all earthly vanities? (Heb. xi. 1).—(*Trapp*).

The family of Jacob thus came to Egypt, not by conquest or purchase, but by hospitable invitation, as free, independent visitors or settlers. As they were free to come or not, so were they free to stay or leave.—(*Murphy*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 21–24.

JOSEPH EQUIPS HIS BRETHREN FOR THEIR JOURNEY.

His bounty towards them was most liberal. They are supplied not only with necessaries, but even with luxuries, and furnished in a style calculated to make an impression upon spectators. The richness and splendour of this outfit was worthy of a brother raised to such high eminence in a great nation. But the whole of this incident brings out these two things especially :—

I. **His respect and honour for his father.** This is seen :—1. *In the portion he gave to Benjamin.* He was furnished more liberally than the rest, distinctly marked out as a peculiar object of favour. (Verse 22.) This would touch the heart of the doting father. 2. *In the portion he sent to his father.* (Verse 23). He could not fetch him himself, but he sends him the richest presents of Egypt. In this way he expressed his peculiar affection for his father. The old man would need the strongest proof of the reality of those strange things he was about to hear, and the style in which his sons were sent to him from Egypt would naturally make a strong impression upon him.

II. His shrewd wisdom. Another point brought out in this incident. Joseph charged his brethren, as they were leaving, "See that ye fall not out by the way." (Verse 24.) This advice was founded upon deep wisdom, and showed great knowledge of human nature in the man who gave it. Joseph had heard already from Reuben some severe reflections upon his brethren. (Gen. xlii. 22.) He might well suppose that they would repeat these things when they were alone. Reuben might have told them how different the result would have been had they taken his advice. Each one would have his cause of quarrel. The unexpected prosperity into which they had fallen would only have served to arouse old feelings of enmity. But they were now restrained by Joseph's sober and timely advice. It is sad to think how that through the fault of human nature, even the manifestations of God's goodness towards us may be made the occasion of wrangling and angry strife. Even when the Gospel message was first announced to the world, men soon began to quarrel with each other. The very terms of salvation were disputed. Men were not content to receive the truth as it was told them, but they must make it the subject of endless and fruitless controversy. Let us be satisfied with the bountiful provision God makes for us by the way, spending our energy in praising Him, and refusing to waste it in the mean warfare of human strifes.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 21. *Provision for the way.* So doth God give all His; meat that the world knows not of; joy that the natural heart never tasted; the white stone; the hidden manna; the continual feast; the foretaste of eternal life, to hold up their hearts till they come home to heaven. On the cates of a good conscience, he goes on feeding as Samson did on his honeycomb, till he came to his parents; as Joseph's brethren here did on their venison, till they came to their father Jacob.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 22. As the fashion of clothes never changes in the East as with us, they do not become useless as long as they last. Joseph virtually published to his brethren the superior regard which he entertained for Benjamin as the son of his mother, as well as of his father. He showed his confidence in their good dispositions towards Benjamin.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 23. It was, no doubt, a pleasure to Jacob to partake of the fruits of the attention and kindness of his long-lost Joseph. Yet we may safely suppose he derived more pleasure from Joseph's goodness to his brethren than from the presents sent to himself. He had no reason to doubt of Joseph's warm, filial affection, but it would fill him with unspeakable joy to find his son exhibiting the highest pattern of meekness and of the forgiveness of injuries that the world had ever yet beheld.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 24. On the journey to eternity we must not become angry, either with our companions, or with God. Christians, as brethren, ought not to quarrel with each other on the way of life.—(*Lange.*)

Joseph's brethren send him naked to strangers, he sends them in new and rich liveries to their father; they took a small sum of money for him, he gives them great treasures; they sent his torn coat to his father, he sends variety of costly raiments to his father by them; they sold him to be the lead of camels, he sends them home with chariots. It must be a great favour, that can appease the consciousness of a great injury.—(*Bp. Hall.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 25–28

The Joyful News told to Jacob.

I. It is, at first, received with incredulity. He is told that Joseph lives, that he is governor of Egypt, and that he himself is summoned to go down thither. These were astonishing tidings. They were as a voice and an appearance from the grave. We do not wonder at their effect upon the physical frame of the aged man. There was a chill at his heart, the news overcame him, yet he received it with incredulity. The very thought of such prosperity, so vividly presented to his mind, would, of itself, powerfully affect his feelings. But he did not believe that all this could be true. There are two kinds of unbelief. One arises from *moral perversity*. A man refuses to believe because he hates the truth, and loves darkness rather than light. He refuses to see the truth, because he is content with his own lie and desires not goodness. He says, "Evil, be thou my good." But another source of unbelief is, *when the news seems too good to be true*. There is a disposition to believe, and even a desire; but the greatness of that which is offered to faith is too much for it. This kind of unbelief does not denote a bad heart, though it may be an evidence of weakness. The Apostle, St. Thomas, could not believe, though he witnessed the joy of those who did. He required to see facts, such outward proofs and evidence which would be powerful enough to convince himself. The very greatness of the things to be believed by us is one of the difficulties of our faith.

II. It is afterwards accepted upon outward evidence. Jacob, at first, gave no credit to the tidings brought to him by his sons. But when he saw the *waggons* he believed. (Verses 27, 28.) It is sad to think that he should believe the waggons more than the word of his sons. But this is true to human nature. A favourable fact comes to the aid of hesitating belief. We can steady our minds upon it. Hence it is that the outward evidences of Christianity are so valuable for the mass of mankind. They produce conviction when other modes of reasoning fail. They make a vivid impression upon the ordinary mind. It is a nobler kind of faith when we can trust God out of sight, when we can believe in Himself as He is made known to our souls, when we have that within us which admires and loves the truth upon our first beholding it, when we are captivated and conquered by its heavenly beauty.

III. It enabled Jacob to vindicate his old character. He was *Israel*,—a prince prevailing with both God and men. He had nobly won that character, and maintained it; but for many years past he had no opportunity to distinguish himself therein. Now his old character is revived. He appears, again, as *Israel*. 1. *His faith triumphs.* As it has done so oft before. He now believes. He is satisfied. "*And Israel* said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive." (Verse 28.) 2. *His dark destiny is now about to be cleared up.* The grief of twenty-two sad and sorrowful years is ended, and the meaning of his life is now, at length, to be rendered clear. The purpose of God is accomplished, and it is full of mercy and goodness to his servant. The soul is satisfied with the loving-kindness of the Lord, when faith is allowed to see and enjoy its victory. 3. *He anticipates his peaceful end.* "Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.' (Verse 28.) He is satisfied now that he shall see his beloved son restored to him, and in great prosperity. He can now look forward to the happy end of his pilgrimage. He had now no more wishes left unsatisfied on this side of the grave. Let him see Joseph, and that is enough. Then, like Simeon, when his eyes have seen God's salvation, he can depart in peace.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 25, 26. Jacob had doubtless been looking and longing for their return, and that with many fears and misgivings of mind. If the matter was announced as suddenly as it is here related, it is not surprising that "Jacob's heart fainted, and he believed them not." The suddenness of the transition would produce an effect like that of fire and water coming in contact. Perhaps, too, we may partly account for this incredulity from the aptness there is in a dejected mind to believe what is against him, rather than what is for him. When they brought him the bloody garment he readily believed, saying, Joseph no doubt is torn in pieces! But when good news is told him, it seems too good to be true.—*(Fuller).*

He believed them not. They had told him a tale before; and he that once hath cracked his credit is hardly, after, believed. Besides, he thought the news was too good to be true. The joy of heaven is so great that we must "enter into it;" it cannot enter into us. (Matt. xxv. 21).—*(Trapp).*

Verse 27. When we see the history of redemption, the progress of Christianity, the means of grace, our confidence in God's gracious intent is strengthened. When the Christian at last sees the provision made for his departure, the Intercessor gone before, the mansion prepared, the escort of angels, the welcome home, he receives dying grace, and often is most cheered and comforted in death.—*(Jacobus).*

Verse 28. Nothing is said of his reception of the gifts, nor is it intimated that he was particularly affected by the report of his son's glory in Egypt; it was enough for him that he was *alive.* Though the sight of Benjamin, an hour before this time, would have appeared to him a sufficient happiness for this world, yet now he enjoys not only that, but cherishes the hope of seeing and embracing once more the son whose loss he had mourned year after year in bitterness of soul.—(*Bush*).

It is enough! The assurance of a living Lord and Saviour is soul-satisfying. We want to go and see Him. (Phil. i. 23).

CHAPTER XLVI.

Critical Notes.—1. **Beersheba.]** This was the frontier town, where Abraham and Isaac had acknowledged God (Gen. xxi. 33; xxvi. 24, 25). 4. **I will also surely bring thee up again.]** "This does not refer to the bringing up of Jacob when dead, to be buried in Canaan,—for there was in that no Divine interposition,—but to the bringing up his descendants at the Exodus, which is ever said to have been God's act, with His mighty hand and outstretched arm." (*Alford*).—*And Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.* Shall perform the last act of filial piety in closing the eyes of his father.—8-28. **And these are the names of the children of Israel, etc.]** "Catalogue of Jacob's sons, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren who went down into Egypt. The children are ranged according to their mothers. In verse 27, the LXX make the whole number who went down to Egypt to be 75. This reckoning is followed by Stephen (Acts vii. 14), who as a Hellenistic Jew naturally goes by the LXX. The list is probably neither complete nor accurate, and must be regarded rather as a formal than as an historical document." (*Alford*).—"If Stephen here quoted the LXX, he was accountable only for the correctness of his quotation, and not for the error which had crept into his authority. This was immaterial to his present purpose, and it was not the manner of the sacred speakers to turn aside from their grand task to the pedantry of criticism." (*Murphy*).—29. **And presented himself unto him.]** The word is commonly used for Divine appearings. Knobel thinks that it is used here as according with the royal pomp with which Joseph was invested.—34. **Thy servants' trade hath been about cattle.]** "This would be the sufficient ground on which the district of Goshen would be granted to them, as keeping them more by themselves, and out of contact with the Egyptian people." *(Jacobus.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-7.

THE MIGRATION OF JACOB'S HOUSE TO EGYPT.

I. It was the second stage in the Covenant History. The call of Abraham was the first stage. At first, God dealt with the individual and with his seed But the time had now come when the *family* is to be raised to a *nation.* As a nation it is to return to the promised land, and there to be trained to act a wonderful, and altogether singular part in the world's history. "Israel was God s illuminated clock set in the dark steeple of time."

II. It was the fulfilment of the Divine plan. Jacob's migration to Egypt was the accomplishment of prophecy (Gen. xv. 13). The Church is to be brought into the midst of heathendom to show that it is destined to conquer the world. The bringing down of Jacob's family into Egypt had an important bearing upon the future history of Israel. It tended to separate them from the nations of the world and to preserve them as a holy people. Had they remained in Canaan, they would have been in danger of being corrupted by the people of the land. They might have been altogether destroyed by wars attempted while they were yet immature. In the course of time they would have mixed with the surrounding nations by inter-marriage, and thus have learned their vices. But in Egypt, they were kept parted from heathendom by a double barrier. (1). Their race. (2). Their reputation as an impure caste. (Verse 34.) Dwelling in a fruitful soil, well adapted to their peculiar industry, they had every means of becoming prosperous. It was also part of the Divine plan *to discipline the people by affliction.* Egypt was to be the house of their bondage under cruel taskmasters. Trial was to develop their strength. They were only to be made perfect through suffering. It takes long years of painful discipline to train a great nation.

III. It was entered upon with due solemnity. When Jacob had arrived at the frontier town, he "offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac." (Verse 1.) Thus he recognises the family covenant. He remembered the word which the Lord spake to Abraham. (Gen. xv. 13.) He saw how wonderfully Joseph's dreams were realised by the events of Providence. Therefore he saw that it was the will of God that he should go down to Egypt. He comes to the place where Abraham and Isaac before him had acknowledged God. (Gen. xxi. 33; Gen. xxvi. 24, 25.) Before he crosses the boundary, he will seek to know the perfect will of the Lord. He had assurance from Joseph, he had fair proof that all would be well; yet he will not take the final step until he has sealed his covenant relation with God. He longed to see Joseph, but his feelings were under the control of religion. He was going into an unknown and dangerous world, and he must commend himself to God by a special act of devotion.

IV. It had the approval of God. "God spake unto Israel." (Verse 2.) This was a great crisis in the history of the Church at which we might expect God to appear. God has always appeared in some special act or word in every great crisis of His people's history. As to Jacob—1. *He found God as he had sought Him.* "I am God, the God of thy father." The Name used reveals the Omnipotent God, the Mighty One who is able to fulfil His covenant engagements, and who could bring Jacob safely through all his difficulties present and future. Israel had found his God faithful in all His gracious dealings, and he believed that he should still see the same loving kindness and truth for the time to come. 2. *The will of God is clearly made known.* "Fear not to go down to Egypt." He was distinctly assured that it was God's will that he should go there." 3. *The protection of God is promised.* "Fear not—I will go down with thee into Egypt."

(Verses 3, 4.) The "I" is emphatic. Jacob had many reasons for fear. He was an old man now, far advanced in years. He was leaving the promised land, and going to a heathen country with the known prospect before him of centuries of affliction for his family. But he has no need to fear, for all is in the hands of God. 4. *The purpose of God is declared.* "I will there make of thee a great nation." "I will surely bring thee up again." This was, indeed, a bright prospect, and well fitted to encourage the faith of the patriarch. And God has fulfilled this word, for He has endowed the nation of Israel with an inextinguishable life. Balaam was struck with this when he said, "Who can count the dust of Jacob." And God promised that he would bring Jacob up again. We are to understand this, of course, of his descendants, who were to be brought up from Egypt at the great Exodus. This event is ever spoken of as the mighty act of God. Thus, not merely *one* was selected, as of old, to receive the word of the Lord and to witness his power, but all the family, now expanded to a nation, were to be included in the chosen seed. And so the promise of Redemption was working itself clearer. This nation was to persist through human history for the salvation of mankind.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. It is both wise and pleasant for us to avail ourselves of the remembrance of our pious ancestors when we plead with God for special mercies. It is sweet to a devout mind to be able to say, "He is my God, and I will exalt Him; my father's God, and I will build Him an habitation."—(*Bush.*)

Jacob's halt at Beer-sheba furnishes a proof of the distinction between human certainty and that derived from the Divine assurance. Thus John the Baptist knew already of the Messianic mission, before His baptism, but it was not until the revelation made at the baptism that he received the Divine assurance which he needed as the forerunner of Christ. In our day, too, this distinction is of importance for the minister of the Gospel. Words of Divine assurance are the proper messages from the pulpit.—(*Lange.*)

Verse 2. The Most High here called him by his first and ordinary name, "Jacob," perhaps to put him in mind of what he was in himself. He was now indeed honoured with a very glorious title, but he must not forget that he was only Jacob when God met with him in his early days. The address which God here makes to his servant undoubtedly had reference to Jacob's design in offering the sacrifices, which was to obtain some clear testimony of the Divine approbation of the step he was about to take.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 3. Cause of fear he might see sufficient; but God would have him not to look down upon the rushing and roaring streams of miseries that ran so swiftly under him and his posterity, but steadfastly fasten upon His power and providence. He loves to perfect His strength in our weakness; as Elijah would have the sacrifice covered with water, that God's power might the more appear in the fire from heaven.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 4. That was as good security as could be. For if Cæsar could say to the fearful pilot in a terrible storm, "Be of good cheer, thou carryest Cæsar and Cæsar's fortunes;" how much more may he presume to be safe that hath God in his company! A child in the dark fears nothing while he hath his father by the hand.—(*Trapp.*)

The Lord does not say that he would bring him up again as soon as the years of the famine were ended. Indeed, the contrary might be inferred from the very words of the promise; for he was to remain there till he had become a great nation; and it cannot be supposed that he expected to live until the promise was accomplished. It was to be in the person of his seed that Jacob was to be brought up to possess the earthly inheritance.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 5. "The sons of Israel carried Jacob their father." A debt of kindness which was justly owed to Jacob from his sons. They were little children at the time of his last journey, and he prayed and wrestled with God for them when they were in danger, and used all possible means to appease their enraged uncle, and moved slowly along the road as the women and children were able to bear. Now Jacob was himself a child in strength, and his vigorous children recompensed their father's tender care by their care of him on the journey.—(*Bush.*)

The word "rose up" is emphatical, and imports that his heart was lightened. As when he had seen God at Bethel, he "lift up his feet," and went on his way lustily. (Gen. xxix. 1.)—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 6. In taking all his substance, as well as his kindred, he would cut off occasion from those who might be disposed, at least in after times, to reproach the family with having come into Egypt empty-handed, and to throw themselves upon the bounty of the country.—(*Fuller.*)

Verse 7. Only one daughter is named in the list, and one granddaughter. There may have been other daughters and granddaughters, who, if they married to Egyptians, or other strangers (or for other reasons) would not be included in the genealogical list, as "mothers in Israel."—(*Jacobus.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8–27.

THE CATALOGUE OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL.

This catalogue of "the names of the children of Israel" is instructive from several points of view.

I. It marks the commencement and gives the outlines of the nation's history. We have here the first draft of those lines of history along which this nation of Israel was to move. The list here given shows the separation of the tribes, and gives us a clear view of the people's increase. We have here the promise of a great nation.

II. It marks the tribe of the Messiah. Our Lord was to spring from the tribe of Judah. This notes God's redemptive purpose in this history, how God designed thereby to bring His First Begotten into the world.

III. The names are significant. Thus the names of Reuben's sons signify—*teacher, distinguished, beautiful one, noble one.* These express a sanguine hope. Also the names of Levi's sons signify—*expulsion of the profane, congregation of the consecrated, practiser of discipline.* These are the leading principles and proper characteristics of priestly rule. We hasten rapidly over biblical names, but much instruction may be gathered from them.

IV. The facts connected with some of the names are suggestive. Thus Dinah, though condemned to a single life, is yet reckoned among the founders of the house of Israel in Egypt. This points to the elevation of woman, and to the idea of female inheritance. Again, Judah was the father's minister to Joseph. By his faithfulness, strength, and wisdom he rises in the opinion of his father. His distinguished place in the annals of the nation comes out, at length, in the grandeur of that prophetic word which declares God's loving purpose in this great history. (Gen. xlix. 10).

V. The number of the names is also suggestive. "It is remarkable that it is the product of seven, the number of holiness; and ten, the number of completeness. It is still more remarkable that it is the number of the names of those who were the heads of the primitive nations. The Church is the counterpart of the world, and is to be the instrument by which the kingdom of the world is to become the kingdom of Christ. When the Most High bestowed the inheritance on the nations, 'when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the sons of Israel.' (Deut. xxxii. 8). This curious sentence may have an immediate reference to the providential distribution of the human family over the habitable parts of the earth, according to the number of His church, and of His dispensation of grace; but at all events it conveys the great and obvious principle, that all things whatsoever, in the affairs of men, are antecedently adapted with the most perfect exactitude to the benign reign of grace already realised in the children of God, and yet to be extended to all the sons and daughters of Adam."—(*Murphy*).

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 8–27. Compared with the families of Abraham and Isaac, these names appear to be numerous, and afford a prospect of a great nation; yet compared with those of Ishmael and Esau, they are but few. Three and twenty years ago there was "a company of Ishmaelites," who bought Joseph; and as to Esau, he seems to have become a nation in a little time. We see from hence that the most valuable blessings are often the longest ere they reach us. The just shall live by faith.—(*Fuller*).

The full people of Israel consisted of twelve sons, and seventy souls; and the Christian Church consisted of twelve apostles, and seventy disciples. —(*Ross*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 28–34.

THE SETTLEMENT OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL IN GOSHEN.

In which two things are to be noticed.

I. The wise policy of this step. 1. *In the choice of a leader.* Jacob sent Judah before him unto Joseph. (Verse 28.) And he was qualified beyond his three brothers for this important mission. It was proper that he should receive from Joseph the necessary orders before entering the country. For Egypt was a well-ordered and organized kingdom, and it could not be permitted that a wandering tribe should pass the borders without ceremony. 2. *In the choice of this particular place.* They were shepherds, and Goshen was best fitted for pasture. Here they would be isolated from Egyptian society; for there were elements belonging to the two nations which rendered them mutually repulsive. The idolatries of the Egyptians would be abhorred by the worshippers of the true God, and "every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians." Religious aversion is the strongest of antipathies. Surely it was Divine wisdom which led Joseph thus to place the house of Israel under the protection of Egyptian contempt. He caused them to accept a humble position, which while it ministered to their temporal prosperity, at the same time promoted their spiritual prosperity as a holy nation.

II. The behaviour of Joseph. In the peculiar circumstances of the case, this was most suitable and dignified. 1. *He determines to announce their arrival to Pharaoh.* (Verse 31.) This was proper in itself, as well as a necessary formality. The rights of place and rank should be respected. 2. *He gives instructions to his brethren.* (Verses 33, 34.) They must enter upon the necessary formality of an introduction to the king. Joseph gives them instructions what to answer, and in so doing is careful to keep them clear of the snares of Egypt. Joseph was a statesman but he had learned that truth is the highest policy; an open, but dignified frankness, the highest wisdom.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 28. Judah had acquitted himself well in a former case of great delicacy, and this might recommend him in the present instance. He who could plead so well for his father shall have the honour of introducing him. It is fitting too that the father of the royal tribe, and of the Messiah, should not be the last in works of honour and usefulness, but rather that he should have the pre-eminence.—(*Fuller.*)

Verse 29. The intermission of comforts hath this advantage, that it sweetens our delights more in return than was abated in the forbearance. God doth oft-times hide away our Joseph for a time, that we may be more joyous and thankful in his recovery. This was the sincerest pleasure that Jacob ever had, which therefore God reserved for his eye. And if the meeting of earthly friends be so unspeakably comfortable, how happy shall we be in the light of the glorious face of God our Heavenly Father! of that our blessed Redeemer, whom we sold to death by our sins, and which now, after all that noble triumph, hath all power given Him in heaven and earth!—(*Bp. Hall*).

Verse 30. He feels so happy that he thinks of nothing but dying. Perhaps he thought he should die soon: having enjoyed as much as he could desire in this world, it was natural now to wish to go to another. Yet Jacob did not die for seventeen years; a proof this, that our feelings are no certain rule of what shall befal us.—(*Fuller.*)

Because thou art yet alive. If this were so great a matter to Jacob, what should it be to us, that Christ was dead and is alive; yea, that He ever lives to make request for us.—(*Trapp.*)

Verses 31, 32. Joseph was loved for his own sake. The greatness of his character was too well established to be affected by the knowledge of any facts connected with his family.

It is observable with what "meekness of wisdom" Joseph demeaned himself in this affair. Most men in similar circumstances would have been for introducing their relations as speedily as possible into posts of honour and profit, lest they should disgrace him. But Joseph is more concerned for their purity than for their outward dignity. He sought to secure them a place as free as possible from the evil influence to which they would be exposed in a court.—(*Bush.*)

Verses 33, 34. Joseph says in effect, "I will go before you, and will tell the king that you are *shepherds*, and have been so all your lives, and your fathers before you. This will prevent any proposals for raising you to any posts of honour in the state. And when you come before the king, and he shall ask you of your occupation, then do you confirm what I said of you; and as the employment of a shepherd is meanly accounted of in Egypt, and those that follow it are despised, and reckoned unfit for the higher offices of the state, this will determine the king to say nothing to you on the subject, but to grant you a place in Goshen."—(*Fuller.*)

Thus began already in the house of Jacob, at its entrance into Egypt, that reproach of Christ which Moses afterwards esteemed greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. This antipathy of the Egyptians towards the shepherd-people was a fence to them, as was afterwards the law of Moses.—(*Ross.*)

CHAPTER XLVII.

Critical Notes.—**2. Five men.]** The number *five* was a favourite number with the Egyptians. (Gen. xli. 34; xlii. 34; xlv. 22; xlvii. 2).—**7. Jacob blessed Pharaoh.]** This word is sometimes used to denote an ordinary salutation. But the salutations used among the pious Hebrews were real prayers addressed to God for blessings on behalf of the person saluted.—**11. The land of Rameses.]** The *land* of Rameses is mentioned here only. The *city* is mentioned in (Ex. i. 11; xii. 37; Num. xxxiii. 3, 5). Herroopolis was afterwards substituted by the LXX as the name in their time.—**21. He removed them to cities.]** Heb.—*According to the cities.* "Thus he distributed the population of the land in and around the cities *according to the cities* in which the grain was stored, so as to produce the easiest distribution of the supplies among them." (*Jacobus.*)—**22. Only the land of the priests bought he not.]** "The Egyptian priesthood was already placed by Pharaoh upon an independent and separate basis. *Wilkinson* shows from the monuments that only the kings and priests and the military (who held lands of the king) are represented as landowners. *Heeren* finds in his researches that a greater, perhaps the greatest and best, part of the land was in the possession of the priests." (*Jacobus.*)—**A portion assigned them of Pharaoh.]** They had daily rations from the king. Thus they had no occasion to sell their land, though it was rendered useless by the famine.—**24. The fifth part unto Pharaoh.]** "The royalty here proposed for the occupiers of the land to pay does not, says Knobel, appear exorbitant. The tenth of the produce of the soil, and also of the flocks, seems to have been a common royal tribute (1 Sam. viii. 15, 17; Levit. xxvii. 30). The kings of Syria received from the conquered Jews (1 Macc. x. 3) a third part of the seed, (*i.e.* cereal crops), and half the fruit of the trees." (*Alford.*)—**26. Except the land of the priests only which became not Pharaoh's.]** "Knobel remarks, that this account is confirmed by history. Diodorus Siculus relates that the only possessors of land in Egypt were the king, the priestly and the warrior-caste: from these the occupiers rented the land." (*Alford.*)—**31. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head.]** "On receiving the solemn promise of Joseph, he turns towards the head of the bed, and assumes the posture of adoration, rendering, no doubt, thanks to God for all the mercies of his past life, and for this closing token of filial duty and affection. The LXX has the rendering, 'on the top of his staff,' which is given in Heb. xi. 21. This is obtained by a mere change in the vowel pointing of the last word." (*Murphy.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-12.

JOSEPH INTRODUCES JACOB AND HIS FAMILY TO PHARAOH.

I. The introduction. 1. *Of Joseph's brethren.* In this appears (1.) *Joseph's character for fidelity to his promise.* He had promised to do this for his father and brethren. And now he does not spend his time in indulgence or festive rejoicing, but takes proper steps to fulfil his word. (2.) *Joseph's respect for constituted authority.* His high position would have warranted him in doing much for them on his own authority. But in this important matter of the settlement of his kindred in the country, he will have the direct authority of Pharaoh. It was only proper that they should remain on the borders until all was settled. Joseph accomplishes his purpose by selecting delegates from among his brethren, which gives to the affair the aspect of a public and political transaction. (3.) *The straightforwardness of Joseph's brethren.* (Verses 3, 4). They desire to be taken for what they are. They envy not their brother's grandeur. The answer which they gave to Pharaoh left them no higher ambition than to be appointed as rulers over cattle. They inform him that they are only come to sojourn in the land. They only require a passing accommodation The Divine plan was impressed upon their minds, and they wish to regard themselves as strangers even in the midst of a nation which affords them peculiar privileges. They reserve for themselves the right of leaving the country when they please. The reception 2. *Of Joseph's father.* (1.) *The reverence due to age.* (Verse 7). The father is not introduced for the purpose of business, but by way of respect. He would soon pass away, and these arrangements would be of little moment to him. When the young men were introduced they *stood.* Jacob, in honour of his years and in compassion for his infirmities, is set before Pharaoh. (2.) *The priesthood of age.* "Jacob blessed Pharaoh." Here was the patriarch and priest of God's church before the mightiest monarch on earth. In political position and importance Pharaoh was greater than Jacob. But Jacob was greater than he in the kingdom of God. Therefore he thought it not presumption to act upon this consciousness. His blessing was more than a mere privilege of venerable age. He was a son of Abraham, one to whom the promise was made, "I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing." He was "a prince," and had "power with God and man, and prevailed."

II. The reception. 1. *Of the brethren.* Pharaoh grants their request, and receives them with courtesy and frankness. He does the best possible for them, as they themselves had limited their ambition. But even within this limit he proposes rewards for superior merit. (Verse 6).—The reception, 2. *Of Jacob.* Pharaoh was struck with his venerable appearance, and enquires his age. This seems to affect him more than the solemnity of the blessing. But it is probable that he felt the influence of Jacob's spiritual character. His question was natural under the circumstances and drew a tender and pathetic utterance from the venerable patriarch. (Verse 9.) Concerning himself he speaks—(1) *Of the shortness of his life.* His days had been "few." He "had not attained unto the days of the years of the life of his fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." He was now 130 years old; but Abraham lived to 175, and Isaac to 180 years. (2) *Of the sorrow which filled his life.* Neither Abraham nor Isaac had so much toil and trouble. Ever since that day when he beguiled his brother of his birthright; all kinds of bitterness seem to have been mingled with his cup. He was a fugitive for his life from his father's house. He was compelled to serve seven years for a beloved wife, and then was cheated of his recompence by his deceitful father-in-law. He was doomed to serve seven years longer, and to endure the vexation of having his wages changed ten times. He was grieved by the dishonour of his only daughter, and by the conduct of his sons who revenged it with such reckless cruelty. His beloved wife died in childbed. Then a cloud of sorrow settled upon his soul and remained to the end of his life, only to be removed by the light of another world (Gen. xlviii. 7). His son, Reuben had disgraced the honour of the family by a foul crime. He had lost Joseph for twenty-two years. He had endured the present famine, with all its fearful anxieties. Surely he knew from bitter experience the ills of human life!

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1–3. That they had an occupation Pharaoh took for granted. God made Leviathan to play in the sea (Ps. civ. 26); but none to do so upon earth. To be idle is to be evil; and he shall not but do naughtily that does nothing. We may not make religion a mask for idleness. (2 Thess. iii. 11, 12.)—(*Trapp.*)

Every Government has a right to

require that those who enjoy its protection should not be mere vagrants, but by their industry contribute in some way to the public good.—(*Fuller.*)

Verse 4. The king's questions corresponded with what Joseph had anticipated. An instance of Joseph's sagacity.

They wished only to be accounted as strangers and sojourners in Egypt. They had left the land of their inheritance for a season. In five years more a great part of the cattle of Canaan was likely to perish; yet they would not on any account renounce their final interest in that good land of promise. It was the land which the God of their fathers had spied out for them and given them for an everlasting inheritance; and there were their hearts. —(*Bush.*)

In our dealings with the children of this world no terms should be made to the injury of our eternal inheritance.

Verses 5, 6. The purport of Pharaoh's reply was this, "As to promoting your brethren, it does not seem to suit their calling or their inclinations. I will therefore leave it to you to make them happy in their own way. If there be one or more of them better qualified for business than the rest, let them be appointed chief of my herdsmen."—(*Bush.*)

Verse 7. The sight of a prince who had shown such kindness to him and his, in a time of distress, calls forth the most lively sensations of gratitude, and which he is prompted to express by a solemn blessing! How befitting, and how affecting is this! It was reckoned by the Apostle as a truth "beyond all contradiction, that the less is blessed of the better."—(*Fuller.*)

Verse. 8. The days that are past may be lost, and worse than lost to us, but they are marked down in a book that shall one day be opened. Have we not lost many of our days? What if they are all lost days? What if all that has hitherto been done by us should be produced against us in the day of trial? What need have we to redeem our time?—(*Bush.*)

Verse 9. The greatness and the littleness of human life. Jacob speaks sadly of his pilgrimage. He calls his days *few*, though he had attained to twice the age now appointed to man. He calls them *evil*, though they were not wholly so; for he had long enjoyed riches and honour, and the far higher blessings which come through the favour of God. He alludes, indeed, to the longer life which his fathers had attained. But this is not the real ground of his complaint. It was not because his life was shorter than theirs that he spake these melancholy words. His real reason was, because *his life was well nigh over*. For it matters not when time has once gone what length it has been. *Nothingness, vanity, emptiness, aimlessness*—these are the sad characteristics of our human life looked upon from its earthly side.

I. Contrast this poor vanishing life of ours with the great capabilities of our souls. Our time on earth is too short to develop the great powers which God has given us. Life appears both *great* and *small*. It is *great*, in that it is filled with so much thought, feeling and energy; *small*, in that it is gone in a moment like a bubble that bursts on the wave. When we look upon human life *in its works and effects*, we see in it the energy of a spiritual existence—the greatness of a soul. But when we look back upon life, it becomes a memory—a mere lapse of time. Thus it is marked by littleness. Yet it is great, in that one moment of strong and noble life within us is worth all the ages of time. Life is disappointing, because the greatness of our souls has no opportunity for working out itself here. As *believers*, we have *to begin here that which only faith can bring to an end*. We are gifted with powers which we know must last beyond this life. These have in them the suggestions of immortality. We are forced upon the thought of another life where we shall have room for the expansion of our powers.

II. Consider some facts of human experience. 1. *Consider the case of a good man who dies full of days.* He may have lived to old age, still we feel that there were germs of goodness in him that had no chance of ripening. He had in him a marvellous kindness, a nobility of mind and heart; but contracted means and opportunities have repressed them, and hindered their proper issues. We feel as if his life had been a failure, as if his mind had never reached its true scope, as if the blossoms of his generous soul had been nipped. His days have been "few and evil." 2. *Consider the case of a good man who dies before his time.* That is as *we* count such. There are some Christian men who in a single moment of their lives have shewn a height and majesty of mind which it would take ages fully to develop. Yet they are suddenly taken away. Surely they are reserved for higher things elsewhere. Such have given tokens of their immortality. There is something in the goodness and graces of the Christian life for which this world affords not sufficient room. Such men have not half showed themselves here, nor half put forth their strength. 3. *Consider the case of the death-beds of some of the saints.* We expect then to see the power of religion manifested, the signs of a hope full of immortality. We listen for a triumphant testimony of the supporting power of God's grace amidst the awful terrors of death. We look for great and noble words. But how often are we disappointed! Illustrating the preacher's words, "How dieth the wise man? As the fool." King Josiah, the zealous servant of the living God, died the death of wicked Ahab, the worshipper of Baal. Death in all its awful forms comes to believers as to other men. By a sudden accident, amidst strangers, in battle, insensible, or seized with raging madness. Thus the golden opportunity is thrown away. The manifestation of the sons of God is hereafter. "It doth not yet appear."

III. Our duty in the presence of these facts. 1. *Seek eternal life.* Like our natural life this is also the gift of God's quickening Spirit. Christ is "the Life." "He that hath the Son hath Life." Without the consciousness of this eternal life, human existence is futile, empty of all solid food. No advance in science, and the arts of civilization can reconcile us to the loss of God and the hope of immortality. If there is no living God who is to reward us hereafter, if this present world is the be-all and the end-all of man, then "vanity of vanities" is the epitaph of life, and the universe is but a gigantic sepulchre. 2. *Look forwards to the compensations of another world.* In the heavenly world, the purposes of our life shall be accomplished, its shortcomings completed, its visions realized, its sorrows compensated.

Verses 10-12. The patriarch could not take leave of the king without again pronouncing a solemn blessing. We discover in this the signs of a hope which reaches beyond all the evils of his life. There is a lasting blessing of the Most High which can swallow up all evil.

Joseph continued to nourish and cherish them "as a little child is nourished." And thus he is made, more than at the birth of Manasseh, to forget all his toil, and all the distresses which he had met with in his father's house.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13-26.

JOSEPH'S ADMINISTRATION IN EGYPT.

I. He introduced a great political and social revolution. The famine was sore in the land. The private supplies of the people being exhausted, they were obliged to purchase. Joseph's foresight had filled the granaries with corn, and therefore to him the people applied. The inhabitants, with the nations around, first parted with their *money*, for the necessaries of life must be had. This enriched the king's treasury; and without injustice, for the corn which was stored up was bought with his own private money. When the people's money failed they brought their *cattle*. (Verse 17.) And when they had parted with these, they brought their *land*; and, lastly, their *persons*. (Verses 20–23.) The effect of all this was, that everything became the property of the state. "The land became Pharaoh's." On behalf of Pharaoh Joseph could say, "I have bought you." But thereby they did not become bondsmen. The term signifies rather, "*I have acquired you.*" Nothing is said concerning servitude. There is simply to be a fixed income tax. They are not to be subject to arbitrary enactions, but to pay a fixed rent.

II. His conduct therein admits of justification. Joseph has been charged with being the tool of an ambitious and despotic ruler, using his foresight and skill in order to reduce a free people to poverty and slavery. But the following considerations may be urged in justification of the course he pursued. 1. *He bought the corn by the king's command and not as ordered of the people.* He paid full price for the corn during the plentiful years. The purchase-money came out of the king's private purse. 2. *If the people had believed the word of God as the king did, they might have laid by grain for themselves.* The straits to which they were put partook of the nature of a punishment. They had the same opportunity as the king, and they might have laid by for the years of famine. But they paid no regard to Joseph's prophetic dreams. Even the years of plenty did not convince them. They mostly used it for purposes of luxury. 3. *It was expedient that the people's wants should be supplied, not by gifts, but by sale.* Otherwise idleness would be encouraged, and the public peace endangered. Joseph's policy promoted industry and loyalty. 4. *This measure actually preserved the people from starvation, and provided them with securities for their future prosperity.* They were hereby saved from famine. They had a regular tax to pay, and so were preserved from any arbitrary rule. They were, in every sense, a free people; for taxes do not make people slaves. Land, property, and labour must be protected by public authority and laws. For these necessary and beneficial purposes the people pay taxes. By means of Joseph's measure the people were placed under the protection of a statute law. They knew the utmost extent of their liability. 5. *The people were satisfied with Joseph's administration.* "Thou hast saved our lives." (Verse 25.) Such was the people's verdict in favour of Joseph's policy. They, who could best understand all the circumstances of the case, pronounce this favourable opinion. They were willing to render the required service to the king.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 13–26. From this time every man held his property and his life in fiefship to the king. This suggests to us two parallel cases, the constitution of ancient Israel and of modern England. In *ancient Israel* we find something parallel. When the destroying angel passed over the houses of the Egyptians, the firstborn of the Israelites were spared. It was then held that every Israelite was bought with blood, and the firstborn of every family offered sacrifice for himself. Afterwards, one tribe was substituted for the firstborn of Israel, consecrated to be priests. If we remember that the tribe of Levi represented the whole nation of Israel, we shall then understand the tenure upon which each man was in covenant with God. He was touched with blood, and thus every power was consecrated to Jehovah's service. We also find this principle *in the constitution of England.* The king is the supreme lord of all property; against the king every crime that is committed is considered to be done. This principle, in three different nations, rests on a separate historical fact. In the case of Egypt, it rested on the preserving the people from famine; in that of Israel, in passing over the first born, and in that of England, on the conquest of the country by one of its ancient kings. That which Joseph meant to teach was the right of monarchy and the duty of the people to their king. In the case of Israel, that which was to be taught was that God was their sovereign, representing to them the majesty of the law. And our loyalty we give to the sovereigns, not because they are the representatives of the majority of the people, but because they are the chosen symbols of that which assuredly came from no people's will, the eternal law of God, the law of right and wrong.—(*Robertson.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 27, 28.

THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL IN GOSHEN.

I. Their quiet possession of the land. 1. *They had the means and appliances of prosperity.* They were saved from great privations, and they dwelt in a fertile land, most favourably suited to their industry. 2. *They enjoyed their freedom by a firm and honourable tenure.* They were hampered by no relations of dependence upon Pharaoh that would be irksome to them.

II. Their prosperity. By the peculiar blessing of God, this people grew into the promise of a great nation. Several things contributed to this. They had a definite territory exactly suited to their calling. They were free from moral contamination by intermarriages with an idolatrous nation. But above all, God bestowed upon them the blessing of an extraordinary fruitfulness. Old Jacob lived with them for seventeen years, and saw the commencement of this wonderful history. Thus he survived the famine by twelve years, and saw prosperity with his children.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 27, 28. It is a remarkable circumstance that until now we read of only two daughters in the family of Jacob. The brothers could not marry their sisters, and it was not desirable that the females should form affinity with the heathen, as they had in general to follow the faith of their husbands.—(*Murphy.*)

Seventeen years. So long he had nourished Joseph; and so long Joseph nourished him. These were the sweetest days that ever Jacob saw. God reserved his best to the last. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for"—be his beginning, and his middle never so troublesome—"the end of that man is peace." (Psa. xxxvii. 37). A Goshen he shall have, either here or in heaven.—(*Trapp.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 29–31.

ISRAEL'S PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

Jacob felt that the inevitable hour was drawing nigh. "The time drew nigh that Israel must die,"—even this man who had "power over the angel and prevailed." He calmly prepares for the end of his earthly pilgrimage:—

I. By an act of faith. He engages Joseph by a solemn oath not to bury him in Egypt, but in the sepulchre of his fathers in Canaan. There was in this request the expression of a natural feeling. Men naturally desire to have at last with their kindred some kind of union in the grave. But with Jacob, there was a desire beyond this; a desire born of strong faith in God. Like Joseph, afterwards, he "by faith gave commandment concerning his bones." He believed in God's promise, and remembered His holy covenant. And as a sign of his faith, he desired that his body should take a previous possession of the promised land.

II. By an act of adoration. "Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head." In Heb. xi. 21, it is said that "he worshipped leaning on the top of his staff." He adored the power and the goodness of God. He expressed the gratitude of his heart for past mercies, for God's appearances to him in the time of trouble, for his faith often in darkness, but still patient to wait for the light; for the assurance of the truth of the Divine promise that his seed should inherit the land, and for the prospect before him of seeing God's salvation, which he had so long waited for. He would also thank God for the closing token of filial duty rendered by his beloved son. The staff by which he crossed the Jordan, and which was with him through all his weary pilgrimage would, by the power of association, aid him to remember all the way which the Lord, his God, had led him.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 29, 30. This he requested, partly to testify his faith concerning the Promised Land, heaven, and the resurrection; partly to confirm his family in the same faith; and that they might not be glued to the pleasures of Egypt, but wait for their return to Canaan; and partly also to declare his love to his ancestors, together with the felicity he took in the communion of saints.—(*Trapp*).

Although we know that we can have no converse with our kindred in that house of silence, yet it gives us some pleasure while we yet live to think that our dust shall mingle with the dust of those whom we love. But the Apostle acquaints us with the secret of his injunction. (Heb. xi. 22). By having his dead body conveyed to that land, he published to his seed and to the world that he believed and embraced the promise, and that he was well satisfied both with the country and with the security given him for the possession of it. In this emphatic declaration of his faith he had in view also the benefit of survivors.—(*Bush*).

Verse 31. He could not go to an altar built for sacrifices of praise; but he exerted all the vigour left him, with the help of his staff, on which he leaned, and performed his devotions in such a posture as showed his reverence and joy.—(*Bush*).

The venerable man, however, is not yet at the point of death, but is desirous of setting things in order, that when he comes to die he may have nothing else to think about.—(*Fuller*).

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Critical Notes.—3. **God Almighty.**] Heb. El Shaddai (Gen. xvii. 1). He refers to the appearance recorded in Gen. xxviii. 13-19.—5. **As Reuben and Simeon they shall be mine.**] "They shall not be two branches, merely, of one tribe, but two fully-recognised tribes of Jacob and Israel, equal in this respect to the firstborn Reuben and Simeon." *(Lange.)*—6. **Shall be thine.**] "The sons afterwards born shall belong to Joseph, not forming a third tribe, but included in Ephraim and Manasseh; for Joseph is represented in a two-fold way through these." *(Lange.)* 7. **Padan.**]—Here alone used for Padan-Aram. **Bethlehem.** An addition of the narrator. **Rachel died by me.** Not near, as referring to space. The preposition has an emotional sense, and means *on account of me, for my sake.* She had borne for him the hardships of the journey, which brought on her fatal travail.—12. **And Joseph brought them out from between his knees.**] "His," *i.e.*, Jacob's. He was in a sitting posture, and in embracing them had drawn them between his knees.—14. **And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head.**] This is the first mention of the imposition of hands in blessing. Also used for the investiture of office. In both senses, retained by the Christian Church (Num. xxvii. 18, 23; Deut. xxiv. 9; Matt. xix. 13; Acts vi. 6; viii. 17). **Guiding his hands wittingly.** The LXX, Vulgate, and Syriac have, *he changed, or crossed his hands.* The expression denotes a conscious and intelligent purpose.—15. **And he blessed Joseph.**] In Ephraim and Manasseh, his representatives. The two are comprehended in the dying blessing of Jacob (Gen. xlix. 22); and of Moses (Deut. xxxiii. 13, etc.). **The God which fed me.** "Fed," *i.e.*, guided and tended me as a shepherd (Psa. xxiii.; xxviii. 9).—16. **The angel.**] The angel of God's presence (Isa. lxiii. 9); the Covenant angel. **Redeemed me from all evil.** Heb. *Goel:* the same as the word used for "Redeemer" in Job xix. 25. **And let my name be named on them, and the names of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac.** "*My name,*" *i.e.* Israel; and let them be counted Abraham's seed and Isaac's. There is special reference to the blessing of the Divine promise on the seed of Abraham and Isaac (Gen. xxi. 12). *(Alford.)*—20. **In thee shall Israel bless.**] "The tribe of Joseph was only regarded as an *example* of prosperity for the rest of the Hebrews, whereas the Israelites were viewed as the cause of blessing for all the other nations." *(Kalisch.)*—22. **One portion above thy brethren.**] He was to have two lots in the land of promise. **Which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.** "The designation of the land as taken out of the hand of the Amorite by Jacob's sword and bow is spoken of in the anticipatory spirit of a prophet, assuming as done that which his descendants should do. See the expression repeated in form of expression almost verbatim (Josh. xxiv. 12)." *(Alford.)* The Amorite was a poetical name for the Canaanites generally.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-7.

Jacob's Adoption of Israel's two Sons.

I. The authority which he claimed for this act. He refers to a leading point in the covenant history. God, the Almighty, who is able to perform His word, had appeared to him, had promised to make him a great nation, and to give his seed the land of Canaan. (Verse 3.) God had spoken to him, and this is his authority. On this he bases all the family hopes. The mention of God's appearance and promise would inspire confidence in Joseph.

II. The purpose he had in view. 1. *To deliver them from the corrupting influences of the world.* Though they had an Egyptian mother, and belonged to that nation by birth and circumstances, yet they were not to be suffered to remain Egyptians. Ordinary men would regard them as having brilliant prospects in the world. But it was a far nobler thing that they should espouse the cause of God, and cast in their lot with his people. 2. *To give them a recognised place in the covenant family.* This would impart a dignity and meaning to their life, and an impulse and an elevation to all their thoughts Godward. 3. *To do special honour to Joseph.* Joseph was worthy of special honour. He was the noblest son of the family. He saved the house of Israel, as well as of Egypt. This act of Jacob would give two shares in the land of promise to his beloved and distinguished son.

III. The sad memories which it awoke. 1. *They were selected in the room of Jacob's two sons, who had forfeited the blessing.* Instead of Reuben and Simeon. They had grievously sinned, and thus lost their inheritance. The portion of Reuben was given to Ephraim; and of Simeon, to Manasseh. The grounds of this are given in 1 Chron. v. 1; see also Gen. xxxiv., xlix. 5-7, Num. xxvi. 28-37; 1 Chron. vii. 14-29. 2. *They reminded him of one whom he had loved and lost.* (Verse 7.) This reference to Rachel does not seem to have any direct connection with what is written before or after. But the old man cannot help remembering that there stood before him now the sons of Rachel's son. He is forced now to think of her. After so many years, he still feels her loss. Time could not altogether heal the deep wound which, now touched by remembrance, opens afresh. It would seem as if he adopted these two boys for Rachel's sake. He did not despise the fresh and deep feelings of his younger days. May we not hope that these tender human feelings which so persist through time and change may survive the grave? Surely they seem to be of such a nature that they are not destined to die. The effect of thus referring to the death of his mother would be to strengthen Joseph's attachment to Canaan.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1, 2. We all know that the mind has a powerful influence on the body, and that strong passions sometimes communicate to it an extraordinary degree of strength. Jacob felt his strength return to him when he heard Joseph's name, and exerted all his vigour to receive him with proper marks of gratitude and affection.—(*Bush*.)

Verses 3, 4. *God Almighty.* 1. The sure support of faith in the Divine promises. 2. The sufficient answer to every doubt. 3. The assurance that no obstacles can finally stand in the way of God's purpose concerning His people.

The truly thankful keep calendars and catalogues of God's gracious dealings with them, and delight to recount and reckon them up; not in the lump only and by wholesale, but by particular enumeration upon every good occasion; setting them forth one by one, as here, and ciphering them up, as David's word is. (Psa. ix. 1.) We should be like civet-boxes, which still retain the scent when the civet is taken out of them. (Psa. cxiv. 1, 2, Ex. xviii. 8.)—(*Trapp.*)

The earthly Canaan was secured by promise to the seed of Abraham till the time came when God should create, as it were a new world, by introducing a new dispensation of grace among them.—(*Bush*).

Verses 5, 6. Thus his sons, as well as himself, were taught to fix their faith and hope not in Egypt, whatever might be their expectations as the descendants of Joseph by an Egyptian princess, but in Canaan, or rather, in the promise of the God of Israel.—(*Fuller*).

Verse 7. Jacob was the better for the loss of his beloved Rachel: he thence became less selfish than before; accordingly, when he came to Egypt there was no unseemly rejoicing as there would otherwise have been, over the brilliant prospects of his race, and the latter part of his life was that of affection, rather than as formerly, of avarice. There is something in this long continuance of affection for a lost wife that seems to tell us something of the possibility of reunion. Upon this subject, Scripture tells us almost nothing. When we look at the analogy of this world, and mark the growth of our affections as they develop in our life, first to parents, then to brother, and then to wife, and then to child, each in some measure supplanting the other, we might be inclined to believe that there would be a perpetual growth of attachments to spirits higher and higher still; but when we see a feeling like this of Jacob's, we cannot but hope that that which had lasted so near to the grave might survive the grave. We know not, God grant that it may!—(*Robertson*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 8–20.

The Blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh.

I. Its nature and property. 1. *They were blessed in the person of Joseph.* He is blessed in his sons. (Verses 15, 20.) The principle is recognised of blessing mankind in the name and for the sake of another. 2. *With the covenant blessing.* Not with that of the gods of Egypt, though he had cause to be grateful to that nation. He would have his children to know the true fount of blessedness. He invoked the blessing of the God of his fathers. (Verse 15.) The assurance that others have shared the gifts of grace with us is a support to our faith. We of the Church belong to a holy nation, which has a great and venerable past. 3. *With the blessing of which he himself had experience.* "The God which fed me all my life long until this day." (Verse 15.) He felt that God had tended and cared for him like a shepherd. This speech was dear to all the patriarchs, and was a favourite image with David and the prophets. In Jacob's lips, the figure is singularly appropriate, for he remembered his shepherd life with Laban. Jacob also invoked the blessing of "the angel which redeemed him from all evil." This was that covenant angel with whom he wrestled, even God appearing as his Redeemer. The chief aspect under which he contemplates God is that of one who rescues from evil—"the Deliverer." (Rom. xi. 26.) This idea is represented in its various forms by the words "Kinsman," "Redeemer," "Vindicator," "Rescuer," or "Avenger." (Isa. xlix. 26, xliii. 1; Ex. vi. 6; Psa. xix. 15; Psa. ciii. 4; Jer. l. 34; Hos. xiii. 14; Job xix. 25.) 4. *With a different blessing for each.* He bestows the larger blessing upon the younger. (Verse 19.)

II. Its outward form. It was conveyed by the imposition of hands. (Verse 14.) The blessing was not merely a wish or a hope, but a reality. This laying on of hands was the outward means or symbol of its conveyance. Outward forms impress, they steady the mind, and assist contemplation. The blessing was as real as the outward act which accompanied it, the reality of nature leading on to the reality of grace.

III. Its warrant. 1. *The covenant position in which God had placed him.* He stood with his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, in the same covenant relation with God. (Verses 15, 16.) 2. *The act was divinely directed.* Old Jacob crossed his hands, and thus in bestowing the blessing reversed the order of nature. (Verses 14, 17.) He refused to be corrected by Joseph, for though his sight was dim, his spiritual eye discerned the will of God. He guided his hands "wittingly," with full knowledge of the decree of the Most High. God, who distributes His gifts as He will, prefers the younger to the elder. Nature and grace often take cross directions. Jacob had spiritual insight and foresight. He was a true prophet of God, and this was his warrant for that great act of faith when he "blessed both the sons of Joseph." (Heb. xi. 21).

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 8, 9. The dying hour must have made an impression on those young men. In death itself there is nothing naturally instructive; but in this death there was simplicity; they saw the sight of an old man gathered ripe unto his fathers, and they would remember in their gaiety and strength what all life at last must come to.—(*Robertson*).

Verse 10. Perhaps this might remind Jacob of his conduct to his old blind father, Isaac. In him we see all the powers of life fading, and we are tempted to say, Can this live for ever? The eye cannot see God, therefore the eye fails; the ear cannot hear Him, therefore it is filled with dust; but faith and love, the things that are to survive the grave, exist in their strength up to the grave.—(*Robertson*).

Verse 11. How much better is God to us than our fears! Only let us wait with faith and patience, and our desponding thoughts will be turned into songs of praise.—(*Fuller*).

God delights to outbid the hopes of His people, and to be better to them than their deserts, than their desires, yea, than their faith (Isa. liv. 2, 3, 12, 14). As it is storied of a certain emperor, that he delighted in no undertakings so much as in those that his counsellors and captains held impossible, and he seldom miscarried. So God—Ex. xv. 11.—(*Trapp*).

Verses 11–14. As a man and a father Jacob would have been of the same mind with Joseph, but as a prophet he must give the richest blessing to him who was to partake most richly of the blessings of heaven. The appearance is as if his hands knew what they were about; they seemed to move themselves intelligently; they performed the office of the eye.—(*Bush*).

Joseph did this for the best; but "God only wise" had otherwise ordered it. We many times think we do well, when it proves much otherwise. "Lean not therefore to thine own understanding," saith the wise man (Prov. iii. 5); but make out to him that "dwells with prudence." (Prov. viii. 12.)—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 15. This is the highest praise that can be given to ancestors this is the crown of all commendation, to have walked with God as a man walketh with his friend. This is better than a thousand escutcheons. "The God which fed me all my life long." Jacob looks beyond all second causes, and sees, as once at Bethel, God on the top of the ladder. (Gen. xxviii.)—(*Trapp.*)

The Lord had been his shepherd, had kept and led him, as well as supplied all his wants. The Lord fed him when he was in his father's house; when he procured his food by toil at Laban's house; the Lord fed him even when in Egypt his beloved son supplied all his wants.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 16. This is the all-sufficient Friend who wards off evil by himself satisfying the demands of justice and resisting the devices of malice. There is a beautiful propriety of feeling in Jacob ascribing to his father the walking before God, while he thankfully acknowledges the grace of the Quickener and Justifier to himself. The *Angel* is explicitly applied to the Supreme Being in this ministerial function. *The God* is the emphatic description of the true, living God, as contra-distinguished from all false gods. Jacob's threefold periphrases is intended to describe the one God, who wills, works, and wards. *And let my name be named on them.* Let them be counted among my immediate sons, and let them be related to Abraham and Isaac, as my other sons are. This is the only thing that is special in the blessing. *Let them grow into a multitude.* The word "grow" in the original refers to the spawning or extraordinary increase of the finny tribe. The after history of Ephraim and Manasseh will be found to correspond with this special prediction.—(*Murphy.*)

God's people are said to have His name called upon them (Deut. xxviii. 11,—Heb. "That the name of the Lord is called upon thee." Let us endeavour to be an honour and a praise to that worthy name by which we are called.—(*Bush*).

Verses 17–19. Here are a couple of

Holy prophets differing in their judgments; yet not about the substance of the blessing, but the circumstance of it. Wonder not though such things still fall out in the true Church, and the doctors sometimes divided in points less material, and that touch not the foundation.—(*Trapp*).

One reason why the Most High does not follow the rules which men would prescribe to Him in the distribution of His favours undoubtedly is, that we may learn not to glory in the flesh, but in the Lord. Were He to dispense His bounties according to such rules as might appear reasonable to us, high thoughts of human worth would be apt to be cherished, and losing our impressions of Divine sovereignty, we should be tempted to "sacrifice to our own net, and burn incense to our own drag."—(*Bush*).

Verse 20. How God sometimes prefers the younger to the elder, we may see in the case of Shem who was preferred to Japheth, in the case of Isaac who was preferred to Ishmael, of Jacob who was preferred to Esau, of Judah and Joseph who were preferred to Reuben, of Moses who was preferred to Aaron, and finally, of David, who was preferred to all his brethren.

God make thee as Ephraim and Manasseh. A form of speech to this day in use among the Jews. As they greet with it men and their young companions, so it is also said to wives and young women: God make thee as Sarah and Rebecca.—(*Lange.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 21, 22.

JACOB IN THE PROSPECT OF DEATH.

The good patriarch had suffered many sore calamities, had been tossed with many a tempest on the waves of this troublesome world. Now the peaceful haven is in sight and he is glad to be at rest. He speaks most simply and calmly of his death. "And Israel said unto Joseph, Behold I die." We have here a threefold picture:—

I. Of strength in weakness. His bodily powers were failing, his eyes were dim; but yet he showed—1. *The strength of faith.* He believed that God would be with his descendants, and bring them up from Egypt; that the Lord would perform that word unto him upon which he had caused him to hope. He describes the portion which he gave to Joseph as that "which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow." As to their *form*, these words refer to the past; but the terms are *prophetical*, and speak of future conquest. The land would be wrested by him from the Amorites in the person of his posterity (Gen xv. 13–16). With prophetic boldness he uses the past for the future. Here was faith in the word of God which came to him. 2. *The strength of Godliness.* He wishes to wean his posterity from Egypt. He desires to make all his descendants the servants of that God whom he had served all his life long. 3. *The strength of peace.* He is calm and peaceful, and to be calm in the prospect of death is to be conscious of the upholding of an infinite strength. All through life, and supremely so in death, the peace of God is the strength of His people (Psa. xxix. 11). And when all fails on earth, they only enter into a deeper and a perpetual peace (Ps. lxxiii. 36).

II. Of success in failure. He was failing on earth, and the time would soon come when he could be no longer with them. "I die," he says, "but God shall be with you." God still lives on; and this was the confidence and stay of his soul. All was failing him now but his God. Helpless on earth, he falls into the "everlasting arms." (Deut. xxxiii. 27.) He still has Omnipotent support, and that was true success.

III. Of life in death. He was dying, but the light of immortality shines through the decays of his mortal frame. His faith and love, strong even to the end, surely lasted beyond death. The soul which has once looked up into the face of God cannot die. The spiritual man shows himself amidst the ruins of death. It is remarkable that Jacob says nothing about the long intervening years of bondage which his children would have to endure. He only speaks concerning the end and grand result of all. He sees nothing now but the true life, real blessedness for himself and for them. The light of God's favour, shining beyond and overwhelming all earthly sorrows, entirely filled his soul

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 21, 22. As it was no more betwixt God and Moses, but "Go up and die;" so betwixt God and Jacob, but "Behold I die." Death, he knew, to him should be neither total, but of the body only; nor perpetual of the body, but for a season only. See both these set forth by the Apostle, Rom. viii. 10, 11.—(*Trapp.*)

The consolation given to survivors. Jacob says, "Behold I die, but God shall be with you," etc. Thus our Redeemer said to His disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away," etc. This then explains to us the principle of bereavement; slowly and by degrees all drops off from us—first our parents, then our companions, till at last we find ourselves alone, with no arm of flesh to support us; and then comes the sense of dependence on the arm Divine: therefore it is emphatically written that He is the God of the fatherless and the widow.—(*Robertson.*)

As to the manner of their deliverance, neither Jacob nor his sons knew any more on this head than Abraham was enabled to inform them, viz., that God would judge the land where they were oppressed, and would bring them out with great substance. Their business was to believe and embrace the promise, and to leave the manner of its accomplishment to God.—(*Bush.*)

CHAPTER XLIX.

Critical Notes.—1. **In the last days.**] This phrase is often used to denote the Messianic times (Isa. ii. 2; Ez. xxxviii. 8, 16; Jer. xxx. 24, etc.). "This passage reaches to that period in the Shiloh, and it embraces the intervening history." (*Jacobus.*) The expression is chiefly found in prophetic passages.—4. **Unstable as water.**] Heb. *Boiling over as water.* Another form of this word is rendered *lightness*, in Jer. xxiii. 32; Zeph. iii. 2, referring to the character of false prophets. The image points to the heated passions which led Reuben into disgrace. **Thou shalt not excel.**] He shall have no share in the dignity and privileges of the firstborn—the birthright supremacy. The double portion was transferred to Joseph, the chieftainship to Judah, and the priesthood to Levi.—6. **In their self-will they digged down a wall.**] The LXX has, *they have hamstrung oxen.* "The true rendering refers to a process of wantonly cutting the tendons of oxen so as to make them useless. In Chron. xxxiv. 28, the carrying off of the cattle is mentioned. This wanton cruelty was doubtless added." (*Jacobus.*)—8. **Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise.**] An allusion to his name which signifies *praise* (Gen. xxix. 35)—not merely the *praised one*, but he for whom Jehovah is praised.—9. **Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up.**] "Judah, the kingly tribe, is likened to the lion, the king of beasts, who has taken his prey in the plain and is returning to his mountain habitation (Cant. iv. 8). It is from this prophecy that the remarkable title of *the Lion* of the tribe of Judah is given to Christ (Rev. v. 5)." (*Alford.*)—10. **The sceptre shall not depart.**] The tribal sceptre—a symbol of royal power and authority. **Nor a lawgiver from between his feet.**] Some render it, nor the judicial staff from between his feet." (*Keil, Kalisch.*) The term means first a commander—*lawgiver* (Deut. xxxiii. 21), then a judicial staff or ruler's sceptre (Num. xxi. 18). "When the ancient kings addressed public assemblies, they held in their hands this sceptre. When they sat in state upon the throne they rested it between their feet, unless personal application was made to them, when they stretched it out. But the sense of *lawgiver* is best suited to the varied form of the parallelism. And then the figure is of the lion, who has *between his feet* the lawgiver; that is—has the legislative control. Judah shall be dominant, and shall have the authority and control as a tribe, until Shiloh come."—*Jacobus.* **Until Shiloh come.**] This has been variously rendered. Some give the meaning, *until he comes to whom it* (the kingdom or control) *belongs.* Others interpret Shiloh as meaning *rest*, or *place of rest*, and accordingly render it, *till rest comes*, or, *he comes to a place of rest.* Some, again, understand it as the name of a *place*, and explain it of the time when the "whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh" (Josh. xviii. 1). But the most natural rendering is the commonly received one, which regards Shiloh as a personal name. It means the same as Solomon, from a verb signifying *to rest.* Therefore it is a prophecy of the Messiah, "the Prince of Peace." Jesus is called our *peace.* "On the coming of Shiloh the last remnant of that supremacy was removed, only to be replaced by the higher form of pre-eminence which the Prince of Peace inaugurates." (*Murphy.*) **The gathering.**] The word means properly filial obedience—a willing homage. "*The obedience* describes the willing submission to the new form of sovereignty which is ushered in by the Shiloh." (*Murphy.*) **The people.**] The peoples—the nations of the world. **11. Washed his garments in wine.**] "Wine is produced in such abundance that it can be applied to such a purpose; a poetical hyperbole, as in Job xxix. 6." (*Lange.*)—**12. His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.**] Lange translates the word rendered "red," *dark gleaming.* He shall be distinguished for dark lustred eyes, and for white teeth. The soil of Judah near Hebron and Engedi produced the best wine in Canaan.—**13 Zebulon.**] The name means *dwelling.* **At the haven of the sea.**] "This tribe touched upon the coast of the sea of Kinnereth and of the Mediterranean." (*Murphy.*)—**14. A strong ass.**] Heb. *An ass of bone.* "The figure here employed has nothing mean about it. The Oriental ass is a more stately animal than the Western." (*Lange.*)—**16. Dan shall judge his people.**] *Dan*, from a verb signifying *to judge.* The expression, *shall judge*, is a play upon the name. **An adder in the path, that biteth the horse-heels.**] "The well-known horned snake, a small serpent of a sandy colour. Its habit is to coil itself, usually in the camel's footmark, in the sand, and thence suddenly to dart out on any passing animal. Horses are in the greatest terror when one is seen ahead." (*Tristram.*)—**20. Asher.**] The word means *blessed.* **His head shall be fat.**] His territory extended from Carmel to Tyre, and comprised some of the richest plains, abounding in wheat and oil. **Royal dainties.**] "Solomon supplied the household of king Hiram from this district (1 Kings v. 11)." (*Jacobus.*)—**21. Naphtali is a hind let loose.**] "He is a beauteous and active warrior, comparable to the so much praised gazelle (2 Sam. ii. 18, etc.)." (*Lange.*) **He giveth goodly words.**] "Eloquence in prose and verse was characteristic of this particular tribe. In Judg. iv. 5, we may study the character of the tribe." (*Murphy.*)—**22. Whose branches run over the wall.**] "Transcend all the usual boundaries of a well-enclosed garden. Joseph is, in prospect, the twofold tribe that bursts the bounds assigned to a twelfth of the chosen people, and overspreads the area of two tribes." (*Murphy.*)—**24. The shepherd the stone of Israel.**] "His rock at Bethel, on whose support he slept as he pillowed his head upon the stone." (*Lange*) "The fostering guardian as well as the solid foundation of his being." (*Murphy.*)—**26. Separate from his brethren.**] Distinguished from his brethren. "A separate one—in his personal consecration, as well as in his historical dignity." (*Lange.*)—**27. Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.**] The warlike boldness of the tribe appears in the history (Judg. v. 14); its distinguished archers and slingers (Judg. xx. 16; 1 Chron. viii. 39, 40; xii. 2; 2 Chron. xiv. 7, 8; xvii. 17). Saul and Jonathan sprang from this tribe.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses 1, 2.*

JACOB AS A PROPHET OF THE LORD.

In this dying speech of Jacob to his sons, we have the characteristics of true prophecy. Consider the following things:—

I. The nature of its contents. 1. *Prediction.* It is true that the office of a prophet was not simply to predict future events. But this was part of the burden of the Lord laid upon him. In revealing the Divine will he had sometimes to lift the veil of the future. We have here, without doubt, the element of *prediction.* If we grant any of the circumstances which invest Jacob with a sacred character; if we believe that he was called of God, and that he was in covenant with Him, then the fact that this discourse was really prophetic presents no difficulty. All is clear enough, and worthy of belief, except upon the *a priori* assumption of the rationalists that prophecy is, in the nature of things, impossible. This speech also contains—2. *Insight into spiritual truths.* The prophet was most of all a seer, one who had insight into spiritual truths, a proclaimer of eternal principles. This is a higher thing than the mere prediction of facts which take place but once. In this discourse we discern eternal principles,—of man's moral and spiritual nature, of the powers which shape history, of God's government of the world, of Redemption, and of the eternal kingdom which shall reign over and beyond all. Consider :—

II. The nature of the style employed. It has all the marks of reality, it is suited to the age, and such as the patriarchs used. It is vague and mysterious, there are no accurate and minute details, but all is given in shadowy outline; and this forbids us to suppose that it was written in after ages in order to fit into history. The very obscurity, and the difficulties in this speech, are themselves a vindication of its claim to be prophecy. Consider :—

III. The impossibility of accounting for these deliverances upon natural principles. Jacob was now a weak and aged man; the last sickness was upon him. And yet he speaks in this sublime style, the proper vehicle of exalted thought and feeling. He utters this wonderful poem. Surely he was Divinely taught and aided. Inspiration is the only solution. That which reveals so much of God's thoughts and ways must be from God. Consider :

IV. The stage of prophetic development which it indicates. The prophecy of Messiah now becomes clearer. First, it is *the seed*, in general terms; then *thy seed*, Abraham's. Now, the very tribe out of which the Messiah is to spring is announced. We have here the full bloom of patriarchal prophecy. The language rises to that poetic form which is peculiar to the Messianic predictions. The blessing of Judah is the central point, where the discourse reaches on to the last times, when God would bring His first begotten into the world, and set up his everlasting kingdom. Consider :—

V. The promise of eternal life which it suggests. The spirit of these prophecies is the testimony of Jesus. And He came that we may have life. Eternal life is the end of all prophecy. In regard to this doctrine we may ask in Jacob's individual case, can we suppose that God would give this light to a man—these reverences and feelings, and then quench his soul in darkness for ever? Could Jacob have been permitted to know of and disclose such a magnificent future, and yet not live on to see it!

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1, 2. The spirit of devoted men of God, in anticipation of death, soars to an elevated consciousness, and either in priestly admonitions, or prophetic fore-seeings, attests its divine nature, its elevation above the common life, and its anticipation of a new and glorious existence. The testimony of antiquity is harmonious in respect to such facts—even heathen antiquity. So declared the dying Socrates, that he regarded himself as in that stage of being when men had most of the fore-seeing power.—(*Lange.*)

He that hears the word of God, must hear as if he did, for so he doth hear for life and death; he must, as Jacob bids his sons, "hear and hearken."—(*Trapp.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 3, 4.

THE BLESSING OF REUBEN.

We seem to have in this, as in other instances, words of cursing rather than of blessing. But in verse 28, Jacob's speeches concerning his sons are called "blessings." He utters words of blame, he rebukes sharply, but does not curse the persons though he denounces the sin. He does not cast off his sons: they still continue among the tribes of Israel. As to Reuben, consider:—

I. **His privileges.** He was the first-born, the first-fruits of his father's manly strength, "The excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power." This entitled him, 1. *To the first rank among his brethren.* 2. *To the leadership of the tribes.* 3. *To a double share of the inheritance.* (Gen. xxvii. 29; Deut. xxi. 17). Such were his high privileges.

II. **His forfeiture of his privileges.** Jacob reminds him of his privileges, only to contrast them with his present state. He will cause him to see what he might have been. Great expectations had been formed of him and he had not answered them. For it is not privileges that make us good or great, but the use to which we put them. Reuben forfeited his privileges,—1. *By a foul sin.* Jacob dwells upon it with all those aggravations that made it to be the most heinous and abhorred. He turns away from Reuben (and addressing his other sons as if by way of pathetic appeal), says, "He went up to my couch." 2. *By his instability of character.* He was "unstable as water," which is sometimes fierce and tempestuous, and always yielding and treacherous. He was that double-minded man described by St. James, whose true image in nature is the restless sea which is the sport of the inconstant winds. (James i. 6, 8.) 3. *By a life of sensuality.* This resulted in that inveterate fault of his character, instability. His passions were heated and furious, like water boiling over. (See *Critical Notes.*) They were ungovernable. He could not rule himself, and therefore could have no influence over others. He was unfitted for power and place. The single sin which made him infamous grew out of his character, confirming and establishing it in evil more and more. And thus the thoughts, feelings, and deeds of a man—the whole of his character in the present—are made and determined by his past. Sin is not merely done and done with. The injury done to our soul remains in its effects.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 3, 4. The term is well adapted both to express the unbridled lawlessness of Reuben's conduct in the indulgence of his passions, and the effect of it in suddenly and irretrievably casting him down from his birthright. The force of a great current of water, when the barriers that restrained it are removed, is irresistible. Such is the force of corruption in men destitute of religious principle; yet nothing is weaker than water in small quantities—it has no principle of coherence or stability. Such is the weakness of men who walk after their own lusts.—(*Bush.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 5-7.

THE BLESSING OF SIMEON AND LEVI.

I. **Their sin.** 1. *Immoderate revenge.* (Verses 5, 6.) They were justified in feeling anger, and even in avenging the outrage upon the family honour. They must have been less than men had they been indifferent. And as religious men they were bound to feel a righteous indignation. In that state of society, when there were no regular modes of trial, the avenger of blood was an instrument of justice. It is the excess of their anger that is blamed. "For it was *fierce*." "For it was *cruel*." Not content with taking vengeance upon the man who did the deed, they slew a whole tribe of men. 2. *Cruelty to unoffending beasts.* They wantonly cut the tendons of animals so as to make them useless. This was an uncalled for ferocity. 3. *Their cruelty was deliberate.* They were, indeed, "brethren" both in sympathy and co-operation. They supported and counselled each other in their cruel designs. They had their "secret," their "assembly." They were men capable of framing dark plots. They wrought iniquity by a law.

II. Their penalty. 1. *To be disavowed by the good.* "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united." Jacob could not prevent their deed, but he would have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. 2. *Their deed is branded with a curse.* He curses their wrath and their cruelty, not their persons. 3. *They are condemned to moral and political weakness.* "I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel." The penalty was appropriate. As they had *worked together* in wickedness, they are to be *divided*. Simeon's tribe was weak, his territory scattered. Levi was likewise scattered in Israel, and had no territorial allotment; yet his was a privileged tribe, being the tribe of priests. The penalty is by grace transmuted into blessing. "The Lord keeps the execution of the sentence in His own hands. Simeon's sons continue to be like himself—doing the same works. On them the sentence falls with unmitigated severity. In the tribe of Levi there are indications of a better mind. And the sentence is graciously sanctified."—*(Candlish.)*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 5. His two next sons were guilty of a crime still worse than Reuben's. If it did not wound their father in a part so tender, it gave him not less pain, and exposed him to greater mischief. If a merciful providence had not wonderfully preserved him, he and all his family must have been destroyed, in consequence of the revenge of the enraged Canaanites.—*(Bush).*

Verse 6. Time had not changed Jacob's feelings with regard to the crime of his sons. His soul had the same abhorrence of the act now, as it had then.

Verse 7. There is a kind of anger which deserves not to be cursed, but to be blessed. Such was the anger of Moses when he came down from the Mount, and seeing the idolatries of the camp of Israel, broke the tables of the law which he held in his hands. But the anger of Simeon and Levi was entitled neither to commendation nor apology. Sharp rebuke is necessary for those who have greatly offended.—*(Bush).*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8-12.

THE BLESSING OF JUDAH.

I. That he should win the praise of his brethren. (Verse 8.) Jacob having now a worthier theme, uses the proper style and language of blessing. We might have supposed that the greatness which he predicts for Judah would have made him a mark of envy rather than an object of praise. But Judah was to be gifted with that supremacy of influence which commands praise and admiration—that greatness springing out of goodness which disarms envy. He was gifted with wisdom and understanding. (Ex. xxxi. 2, 3.) He had all those elements of mental and moral character which gave him a sovereign dominion over other minds. As his name signifies, his brethren were also to praise God *for him*, on his behalf. His excellency would make an impression upon his *brethren*, upon those who knew and understood him best; and they shall be constrained to praise God for him. He was a good gift; he would diffuse blessing, and they must say, "the Lord be praised." See the power of character. Judah would not have to court praise. His brethren would give it to him of their own accord. His conquests, won by the strength of his goodness, would bring him renown and reverence. He had that unobtrusive and unconscious greatness which must prevail in the end. "The meek shall inherit the earth."

II. That he should be the type of the victorious hero. He is compared to a "lion." (Verse 9). The Hebrews had several distinct words to represent the different ages and degrees of strength and fierceness of the lion, three of which occur in this verse. These indicate different stages in the history of Judah's supremacy. 1. *A growing power.* He is compared to "a lion's whelp," a young lion, who has more growth to expect, who is only in the beginning of his strength. Judah's dominion at its commencement was small. He governed the people, at first, by petty rulers such as the judges. Afterwards came the race of kings, national prosperity followed, great institutions flourished, and the people enjoyed the land of their fathers in peace. So the kingdom of the Messiah—who was the "lion of the tribe of Judah"—started apparently from small beginnings, but in the course of the ages it has grown great. It is the realm that for ever lasts. It will secure for His people quiet habitations, thrones of power, and seats of monarchs whose kingdom passes not away. 2. *A righteous power.* Judah is also compared to a "lion," in the full vigour of his strength. The figure implies a lion in the den, satiated with prey, and is, therefore, *couchant*, not *rampant*. The strength of Judah was not to be the strength of the oppressor, but rather of him who is strong in his right, in the majesty of defence. Such is the strength of the Messiah. His kingdom is founded upon righteousness. 3. *A power to be dreaded.* "Who shall rouse him up?" Men are to stand in dread of his power, though it seems to slumber. His was a power to bless; but woe to those who rouse it up and so turn that power against themselves. Christ is at rest as a lion going up from the prey; seated at the right-hand of God as a lion couchant, reposing after His conquest over the powers of darkness, and it is at the peril of the greatest monarchs to rouse Him up. (Ps. ii. 10–12). "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little." It is to be lamented that we do not love Christ more, that we do not trust Him more; but is it not even more dreadful that we have so little *fear* of Him! Let us beware how we arouse that wrath which is so terrible, even when it is "kindled but a little."

III. That he should be the type of the Messiah. (Verse 10.) We have here one of the first and clearest prophecies of the Redeemer. Judah's kingdom was to lead up to the higher and more enduring kingdom of Christ. He was a type of the Messiah—1. *In His sovereignty.* For (1.) *He had regal power.* He was to hold the sceptre, until his sovereignty should receive a higher meaning and be absorbed in that of the Messiah. (2.) *He had power combined with gentleness.* He is compared to "a lion," and yet he is to prepare the way for Shiloh, "the Prince of Peace." In Rev. v. 5, we read, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed to open the book." The idea of a lion seems to be opposed to that of peace. But the prophet immediately says, "And I beheld, and lo! a lamb as it had been slain." The two images combine to form one truth. There is a strength of force, and there is another which is gained and established through suffering, spiritual conquests and greatness. (3.) *He had a power which sweetly wins obedience.* The "obedience of the peoples" was to be to Shiloh. The cross has the power of attraction by its exhibition of Divine love. Christ, being lifted up, draws all men unto Him. His kingdom is founded not upon force, but upon love. 2. *In his prosperity.* Temporal prosperity was the lot of Judah. (Verses 11, 12.) Wine and milk are also the symbols of gospel blessings (Isa. lv). The Messiah shall prosper, ever winning great and lasting victories. "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand" (Isa. liii. 10).

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 8. All this is chiefly verified in Christ. In Him is beauty, bounty, goodness, greatness, and whatsoever else is praiseworthy. He goeth forth riding on His white horse, "conquering and to conquer." (Rev. vi. 2). St. Paul, His chief herald, proclaims His victory with a world of solemnity and triumph (1 Cor. xv. 56), and he calls upon all his brethren to bow down before Him (Phil. ii. 10), as they do (Rev. xii. 10), casting down their crowns at His feet (Rev. iv. 10).—(*Trapp*).

Verse 9. The theme swells under contemplation, and we are insensibly led by the language employed to trace the spiritual career of "David's greater son," who, while He warred successfully with the powers of darkness during His ministry on earth, despoiling His most potent adversaries, and dividing the spoil with the mighty, till, rising from the dead He "went up" in a triumphant ascension from the field where His victories had been won, like the lion returning to his lair gorged with prey, and set down at His Father's right hand, in a rest which no enemy can presume to invade but at his utmost peril.—(*Bush*).

Verse 10. Shiloh, the Pacificator, or Prince of Peace. Much has been written to evade the difficulty which arises from the fact that there was no king in Israel when He came. But surely it is not needed. Ten tribes disappeared. Of the remaining two, both merged themselves in Judah; and the sceptre is only a figurative and poetical name for nationality. Israel's nationality, merged in Judah lasted until Shiloh came.—(*Robertson*).

For our sakes Israel and Judah enjoyed the Divine protection till Christ came, that we might be saved by His obedience to the death. The whole train of providential administration in the world, and especially towards the chosen people, was directed towards the redemption and salvation of men as its object. What despisers, then, are we of our own mercies if we refuse to join the concourse that is flocking to the standard of the Shiloh?—(*Bush*).

This is the central vision, coming from the central feeling, and around it all the rest are gathered. They are to it as the historical frame to the picture. Judah is more closely connected with this central vision than all the rest. We can trace the name Shiloh to no antecedents. It was a wondrous, a mysterious name. It was intended to be mysterious that men might ponder much upon it, and be the better prepared to understand its glorious import, when it should be fully realised upon the earth.—(*Lange.*)

Verses 11, 12. His was to be a territory rich in vineyards and pastures. It has been said that prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament, tribulation the specific promise of the New. But this is scarcely true; in the New, as in the Old, temporal blessings follow certain qualities of heart. The laws of God remain unalterable. The fifth commandment "with promise," is quoted by Paul as valid in the Christian dispensation still And in the sermon on the Mount, Christ says: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." The fact is not that the consequences of right and wrong are changed, but that the New Testament has brought out, with peculiar prominence, a class of results of right doing which were only dimly visible in the elder dispensation.—(*Robertson.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13-21, *and Verse* 27.

THE BLESSINGS OF ZEBULUN, ISSACHAR, DAN, GAD, ASHER, NAPHTALI, AND BENJAMIN.

Consider these blessings—

I. In their variety. 1. *Maritime power.* Zebulun was to "dwell at the haven of the sea," to be "for an haven of ships." (Verse 13.) 2. *Husbandry.* Issachar is compared to "a strong ass, couching down between two burdens." He was to be an agricultural tribe. He would not require the heroic qualities of Judah, nor the enterprise of Zebulun. He would be content with the fruits of peace and industry, not caring for a life of adventure or the fortunes of war. He would be willing enough for humble and patient service, but his fault was that he had no strong heroic impulse. "He saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant." (Verse 15.) He wanted to enjoy ease at the cost of liberty. He had no public spirit, no energy to strive for a larger and higher freedom. "He bowed his shoulder to bear," was satisfied with slavish work and easy wages; and thus he "became a servant unto tribute." 3. *Political sagacity.* "Dan shall judge his people." (Verse 16.) He was to be raised to a position of rank and political power. But he would gain dominion by a serpent subtlety, employing the might of craft against stronger foes. (Verse 17.) 4. *The power to conquer by perseverance.* (Verse 19.) Gad, whose name signifies "a troop," was to become a warlike tribe. Though he might be often vanquished yet he was to overcome at last. He would have the rewards of patient continuance. The promise of final victory would enable him to bear present defeat. 5. *Plenty.* (Verse 20.) The name "Asher" signifies *the happy*, or *making happy*. He was destined to enjoy great temporal prosperity. His lot was to be a rich one, yielding him not only necessaries, but dainties, even royal dainties. Material culture, all that ministers to the refinements of enjoyment and pleasure,—these were to be his good things. 6. *Eloquence.* Naphtali is compared to "an hind let loose." (Verse 21.) His tribe was to be distinguished by vivacity, timidity, and softness of manners. Yet he was to be renowned for that wonderful gift of eloquence which would invest him with a sovereignty over the minds and hearts of men. This tribe was famous for eloquence both in prose and poetry. Naphtali was to utter words of beauty. Witness the poetic effusion of Barak—the war-song of the Naphtalite hero and Israel's deliverer. (Judges v.) Most of our Lord's Apostles who preached the Gospel throughout the world with such power and eloquence were from this tribe. 7. *The warlike character.* "Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf." (Verse 27.) The incessant and victorious capture of booty, military ardour,—these were his characteristics. Yet withal generous, and full of self-sacrifice for the sake of others. He is ready to divide at night that spoil which in the morning he had won with such daring and risk. Consider these blessings:—

II. In their unity. Each tribe has its own special characteristic, its own special gifts and powers. All these constitute one grand unity. Such is the order of nature—unity in variety. This diversity in the distribution of gifts and endowments contributes to *human happiness*, and to human *prosperity*. The conquests of humble industry may not be brilliant, but they are useful. The king himself is served by the field. The delicate, the eloquent, the refined, the warlike hero—these could not subsist without the aid of the laborious and the resolute. And the hard toils of men may be relieved and elevated by the gentle influences of the arts and refinements of life. As it is in the several departments of nature, so in human society we give and take; and thus contribute to the unity of God's grand purpose in the march of history.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 13–21. The twelve loaves of shewbread remained for ever before the Lord on the altar, proclaiming their separateness, their characteristic differences, and their unity in working out one great purpose; one in God by difference. By differences between man and man, church and church, nation and nation, the true organic unity is attained and kept.—(*Robertson.*)

Verse 18. Jacob's spiritual character, as tested by his ejaculation. A *religious* ejaculation from the dying patriarch breathless and exhausted with speech. Our exact character is tested by our spontaneous thoughts. Watch how the mind turns when pressure and coercion are taken off, and you know of what kind it is. Thus sudden events, sudden pangs, accidents, etc., determine for us the state of our souls, and show us the high-water mark of our spiritual attainment. From one man they wring a curse; from another, a slang expression; from a third, a natural prayer. Judge yourselves by this test. It would be dangerous to judge others always. But take it as a fair test of Jacob's state.—(*Robertson*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 22-26.

The Blessing of Joseph.

The patriarch delights to dwell on this theme. The whole tone of his language changes; and he pours out his full soul in blessings upon the head of his long lost, but now restored and exalted son. He has the richest and largest benedictions for him who was the saviour of his house and the type of the coming Deliverer. All the father's heart is here. There are three elements in this blessing of Joseph.

I. Prediction of his future greatness. 1. *His extraordinary increase.* He was to be as a "fruitful bough" planted "by a well." His descendants would spread and flourish, like a tree planted by the rivers of water. (Psa. i. 3). His "branches" would even "run over the wall;" they would outgrow their boundaries. The remarkable increase of this adopted tribe is recorded in Num. i. 33–35; Josh. xvi.; xvii.; Deut. xxxiii. 17. 2. *His great prosperity.* (1.) *All kinds of blessings were promised.* "Blessings of heaven above." (Verse 25). The uses and favours bestowed by the air, the rain, and the sun; and above all, spiritual blessings from on high, of which these were the natural symbols. "Blessings of the deep that lieth under." The springs and streams, and the fertile soil; and chiefly those gifts which arise from God's deep fountains of love, from Him with whom is the well of life. "Blessings of the breasts and of the womb." A numerous offspring, children of the home, flocks and herds in abundance. (2.) *His blessings were* *to surpass all former instances.* "The blessings of my father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors." (Verse 26). They were to surpass those blessings which came upon Jacob from *his* father, as far as the old mountains tower above the earth. They were to rise until they reach the summits of the everlasting hills; as it were, a complete deluge of blessing. (3.) *His blessings are traced to their source.* "The God of thy father who shall help thee." "The Almighty," who is able to control all adverse powers and to accomplish His will, who has the ability as well as the disposition to be good.

II. Praise of his character. He dwells upon what Joseph was and had been. 1. *He had been a much tried man.* "The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him." (Verse 23.) (1.) *The archers of envy and hatred.* The envy of his brethren wounded his feelings, their cruel words like arrows pierced his soul, their hatred sold him into slavery. (2.) *The archers of temptation.* He was tempted by an adulterous mistress. (Gen. xxxix. 7-19.) (3.) *The archers of persecution.* He was imprisoned by his master, though he was innocent of wrong. Though supported by his integrity, yet he felt the trial. The iron entered his soul. (4.) *The archers of neglect and ingratitude.* His patience was sorely tried by his fellow prisoner, who forgot him, leaving him to languish in his long imprisonment, when a word spoken in praise of such a benefactor might have brought deliverance. 2. *He had gained the victory over his trials.* "His bow abode in strength." (Verse 24.) It was kept strongly strong, was never allowed to weaken or slacken, was always ready. (Job xxix. 20.) He was not one of those who faint in adversity. (Prov. xxiv. 10.) He always had great moral strength and firmness of character. His courage and self-possession never forsook him. The patriarch does not forget the Divine source of his strength; "The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." (Verse 24.) The God who had shown His mightiness in Jacob's own deliverance. "The stone of Israel" was the strong foundation of his life. "The Shepherd" of Israel was his guide and defence, his living, personal God.

III. His destiny the natural result of his character. His future might be judged from his past; for *that* contains in itself all the elements of true greatness. 1. *His filial obedience.* This was his peculiarity. He kept that commandment which has promise. He had learned to obey, and so he was fit to rule. 2. *His desire for God's glory.* He had the fear of God before his eyes, and considered that his life was ordered by Divine wisdom for the good of others. (Gen. xlv. 7, 8.) He who thus glorifies God must be blessed. To show, further, how his future might be inferred from his past, consider :—3. *The operation of that principle by which God rewards in kind.* Joseph was "separate from his brethren;" first by a painful exile, and now by a glorious promotion and distinction. This separation had the effect of forcing him back upon himself, and of fetching out and bringing to the surface the true greatness of his character. He was rewarded in kind—separated first by adversity, and then by superior rank and blessing. 4. *The principle that God's dealings in the past constitute a ground of hope and trust for the future.* God hath and God shall is sound Scripture logic. (Psa. lxxxv. 1-4; 2 Cor. i. 10.) The goodness and grace of the past is a pledge for the future. We may be sure that our God will be always like Himself. "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." (Psa. lxiii. 7.) 5. *The principle by which a firm and well-established godliness tends to continue.* The figure which represented the vitality and increase of Joseph's family was also true of his spiritual nature. His soul was like a tree planted by the rivers of water, ever full of vigorous life and bringing forth abundant fruit. He had overcome temptation, and thus had proved the strength of his character. He had been used to the ways of obedience until they had grown into a habit. He had enjoyed the favour of God until it became his chief delight. The natural tendency of a godly life (natural with the new nature) is to continue. "The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." (Job xvii. 9.)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 22. The emblem of the "vine running over the wall" aptly denotes a population swelling beyond the compass of the bounds which they were to occupy. How strikingly this was fulfilled in the case of Joseph! (Josh. xvii. 14–18.)—(*Bush.*)

Verses 23, 24. The Divine favour forsook him not; he was preserved and relieved by the mighty God of Jacob, by whom he was delivered when his death was designed; preserved chaste when tempted to sin; rendered prosperous from the depth of his affliction; and finally advanced to great dignity, and made an instrument of most signal good to others. Thus his "low abode in strength," denoting unconquered perseverance in a particular state or condition.—(*Bush.*)

The sound heart stands firm under greatest pressures (2 Cor. i. 9, 12). Whereas, if a bone be broke, or but the skin rubbed up and raw, the lightest load will be troublesome. Hang heavy weights upon rotten boughs, they presently break. But Joseph's were green, and had sap.—(*Trapp.*)

Verse 25. God "shall hear the heaven, the heaven shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn, wine, and oil;" the genealogy of all which is resolved into God (Hos. ii. 21, 22).—(*Trapp.*)

The earth shall rise up against the wicked, and the heavens shall reveal their iniquity; but heaven and earth, and the waters below the earth, shall combine, under the control of Divine Providence, to furnish blessings to God's people.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 26. To Joseph is given a double portion with a double measure of affection from a father's heart. Like an overflowing flood his blessings have risen to the very summits of the perpetual hills in the conceptions of the venerable patriarch.—(*Murphy.*)

The spirit of his benediction was, by how much he was afflicted for the sake of others, by so much let him be blessed and honoured, and that to the latest posterity! And such is the mind of God, and all His true friends concerning a greater than Joseph (Heb. ii. 9; Rev. v. 11, 12; i. 5, 6).—(*Fuller.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 28-33.

THE DYING JACOB.

I. His peace. His work is now done, his last blessing pronounced, his last prayer uttered. Nothing more is left but to gather up his feet and die. His life was satisfied with the goodness of the Lord. With great calmness he gives command concerning his burial, but here he reveals that habit of mind which he had of always dwelling upon the past. He was a man who was fond of recording seasons. He had his history by heart. He gives orders to be buried with his fathers, but he cannot help reviving the tender memories that gather around that sacred spot. "There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; . . . . and *there I buried Leah.*" The sense of God's goodness in the past gave him peace and hope. (Isa. xliii. 1–3).

II. His faith. He was one of those who died in faith. (Heb. xi. 13–21). He had faith that God would give his descendants the land of Canaan for an eternal possession, and as a pledge thereof desired that his body should rest in that sacred soil. Like Moses, he was ready to forsake whatever honours his family might have in Egypt. He had faith also *in his own future bliss.* The salvation which he had long waited for, he is now destined to see. He was "gathered unto his people," not only laid with them in the grave, but joined them in that better country which is an heavenly.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 28. Here is something which tells of the character of future judgment. Have you ever attended the opening of a will, where the bequests were large and unknown, and seen the bitter disappointment and the suppressed anger? Well, conceive those sons listening to the warning doom. Conceive Reuben, or Simeon, or Levi listening to their father's words. Yet the day will come when, on principles precisely similar, our doom must be pronounced. Destiny is fixed by character, and character is determined by separate acts.—*(Robertson.)*

Verses 29–32. Jacob loved Rachel with warmer affection than his fathers Abraham and Isaac, yet it was not his wish to be buried with her. He would show that he had the same pious confidence as they had in the Divine promises. His command, therefore, to his sons was a public profession that he also lived and was now dying in the same faith by which his venerable progenitors had embraced the promise.—*(Bush.)*

Verse 33. He was gathered to "the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven." (Heb. xii. 23.) In Jerusalem, records were kept of the names of all the citizens. (Ps. lxxxvii. 5.) So it is in heaven, where Jacob is now a denizen.—*(Trapp.)*

CHAPTER L.

Critical Notes.—**2. The physicians.]** The Egyptians had special physicians for each disease; the embalmers forming a class by themselves.—**3. Mourned for him three score and ten days.]** The *seventy* days of mourning included the *forty* required for embalming.—**5. My grave which I have digged for me.]** "This term is applied to the preparation of a tomb (2 Chron. xvi. 14). He thus speaks of having himself done what had been done by Abraham (Gen. xxiv.); though it is not impossible that he had made preparations there for himself when he buried Leah." *(Jacobus.)*—**7. The elders of his house.]** The court officials. **The elders of the land of Egypt.]** The state officials.—**10. Beyond Jordan.]** Considered, not as written from the position of Moses, but as bearing the usual meaning—East of the Jordan.—**11. Abel-mizraim.]** "This name, like many in the East, has a double meaning. The word Abel no doubt at first meant mourning, though the name would be used by many, ignorant of its origin, in the sense of a meadow." (*Murphy.*)—**15. Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him.]** The literal rendering is—*If Joseph should now punish us, and requite all the evil that we have done to him*—— The sentence breaks off unfinished, requiring some such filling up as, *what then?* or, *that would be our ruin.*—**16. And they sent a messenger unto Joseph.]** From Goshen to Memphis.—**23. Of the third generation.]** "Either sons *belonging to*, or sons *of*, the third generation. If the former, then his (Joseph's) great,—if the latter, his great-great-grandchildren." (*Alford.*)—**Were brought up upon Joseph's knees.]** The meaning is, that they were placed upon his knees, when new-born, for his recognition and blessing (Gen. xxx. 3). **25. Ye shall carry up my bones from hence.]** The record of his burial is preserved (Ex. xiii. 19; Josh. xxiv. 32). It was at *Shechem.*—**26. He was put in a coffin in Egypt.]** "The mummy of Joseph was put, as was the duty of the embalmers, in a chest of wood, such as may be seen in our museums to this day." *(Alford.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 1-13.

THE HONOUR PAID TO THE DEPARTED JACOB.

This was of two kinds. I. Private. The dead body of Jacob was honoured. 1. *By the tears of his family.* All the sons loved their father. They performed their last office for him by laying him in the grave. (Verses 12, 13.) They mourned for him with true affection. But in Joseph especially is this strong filial love manifested. He fell with tears and kisses upon the dead face of his beloved father. (Verse 1.) When he stood by the old man's bedside with his two sons, he listened calmly to the prophetic words which were uttered; he could bear up and control his feelings; but when the last spark of life was gone, he gave way. A crowd of overwhelming thoughts rushed upon him, and held to that dear embrace he abandons himself to grief. Jacob was honoured also 2. *By the respect paid to his last wishes.* He desired to be buried in the sepulchre of his fathers, around which gathered so many tender and solemn memories. His sons carried out that wish. (Verses 4, 5, 12, 13.) It was a bold thing for Joseph to ask so much of Pharaoh, for the journey to the grave was about three hundred miles. The embalming would be necessary in order to prepare the body to be borne such a long distance. Thus the desire of the dying man was fully accomplished. He was laid, the latest occupant, in the sepulchre whose denizens he had but a short time before enumerated. (Gen. xlix. 31).

II. Public. Public mourning was ordered. "The Egyptians mourned for him threescore and ten days." (Verse 3). This fell but a little short of a royal mourning. Jacob was honoured by a great nation with a *public funeral*, on an imposing and magnificent scale. In the funeral procession there were court and state officials, a military escort of chariots and horsemen;" it was a very great company. (Verse 9.) The Canaanites were impressed with the sight, and called the place where the funeral procession halted by a name which signifies, *the mourning of the Egyptians.* (Verse 11). 1 *This might be objected to as merely formal.* In the customs of polite nations, in the matter of court mourning, there is, no doubt, much that is mere outward form. Yet even these ought not to be despised as having no value. They are an outward witness of what men ought to be, and what they ought to feel. They show respect for departed worth, sympathy with survivors, and a thoughtful and solemn recognition of our common mortality. 2. *This might be objected to as utilitarian.* Some would say, this was altogether an unnecessary expense, time and labour wasted to no profit: "To what purpose is this waste." (Matt. xxvi. 8.) The disciples of our Lord objected to the costly ointment poured upon Him, in this same utilitarian spirit. But Christ discovered a native beauty in actions far surpassing the value of their outward form and use. Thus truth, goodness, and charity may be profitable in what they bestow; but they are also lovely in themselves. They are to be admired apart from the benefits they render. As they cannot be gotten for gold, so they are not to be compared with it. This mourning was imposing in its expensive grandeur, yet it produced feelings and impressions of more value than mere wealth. It produced respect for goodness. Men could not help reflecting upon that greatness of character which had won so much public homage. It strengthened the finest and noblest human feelings,—love, sympathy, compassion for those in sorrow. It invited to seriousness, giving men time to pause in the midst of busy life, so that they might think upon another world. And unless this inward life of noble thoughts and feelings is encouraged, of what use is a nation's wealth and splendour?

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. We are not told what Reuben or Simeon felt on this occasion; their sensibilities were not so strong as those of Joseph, but their self-reflections must have been bitter. Joseph's tears were attended with secret consolation. —(*Bush.*)

Verse 2. With wonderful propriety does Joseph unite in his own person the Israelitish truthfulnes with that which was of most value in the Egyptian customs and usages.—(*Lange.*)

Jacob was embalmed, according to the custom of Egypt. This was done to retard the progress of corruption; for so long as the body was there, their friend seemed still among them. In that we find an intimation of immortality.—(*Robertson.*)

Verse 3. All the Egyptians saw how dear Jacob was to their lord, and thought they could not pay a more suitable token of respect to him than by mourning for his father. When good and great men die, it is proper that the general heart of the community should feel the stroke of Providence. A loud voice comes from their graves, proclaiming that soon we shall be with them. Shall we not, then, prepare for the decease which we must so soon accomplish?—(*Bush.*)

Verse 4. Joseph could not apply in person to Pharaoh, because he was in mourning attire. It had been a long established custom in the time of Esther, to exclude all such from the courts of kings. (Esther iv. 2.) The palace was regarded as the image of heaven, the region of life and gladness, and therefore, the visible signs and symbols of death could not be permitted to enter.

Verses 5, 6. The Egyptians were very jealous of the honour of their country which they esteemed "the glory of all lands." They might have thought that Joseph, who had received such honours in their land, did not discover a grateful sense of their favours, if he had carried his father's body to be buried in another land without giving a good reason for it. The old man had himself, moreover, been treated with great generosity by Pharaoh. Joseph wished to obviate any such reflections, and therefore produced reasons for his request.—(*Bush.*)

Verses 7–13. The mourning train of Jacob, a presignal of Israel's return to Canaan. The dead Jacob draws beforehand the living Israel to Canaan. Before all is the dying Christ.—(*Lange.*)

In this there was fulfilled the promise made. (Gen. xlvi. 4.) Jacob was literally brought back from Egypt to Canaan; since for his body did God prepare this prophetic journey. —(*Starke.*)

So great a cavalcade attending Jacob to his long home through a part of two different countries would spread the fame of the good man, and revive the remembrance of him in the land of Canaan. And it was much for the interest of religion that his name should be known. In his life he had eminently displayed the virtues by which religion is recommended.—(*Bush.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 14-21.

JOSEPH'S LAST FORGIVENESS OF HIS BRETHREN.

I. Their need of forgiveness. Their father, who was the bond of love between the brothers, was now gone; and they naturally fear lest Joseph should punish them for the previous wrong they had done him. The old wound breaks out afresh. They begin to suspect that the kindness Joseph had shown them was only for their father's sake, that Joseph never really forgave them in his heart, and that now, when the restraint of their father's presence is removed, he will take vengeance. Sinners find it difficult to believe in human goodness. Conscious guilt is always alive to fear. Their fears were groundless, yet conscience taught them what was true, *i.e.*, that sinners deserve to be requited according to their works. But to appreciate the majesty of goodness, to feel and know what is godlike in another, requires a spiritual mind. Wisdom can only be justified of her own children.

II. The plea on which they urge it. 1. ***The dying request of their father.*** (Verse 16, 17.) They bring forward their father as a mediator. They request that his word shall be held sacred, shall still be a defence between them and the dreaded evil. They admit the justice of their punishment, but desire pardon for the sake of another. 2. *Their own free confession of guilt.* "The trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil." (Verse 17.) This confession they allege was prepared for them by their father, and they adopt it with all its humiliating terms. 3. *Their father's influence with God.* "Forgive the trespass of *the servants of the God of thy father.*" (Verse 17.) They would strengthen the tie of nature with the tie of religion. They would say, as we have one father, so we have one God; forgive us for His sake, the God of our father. Guilty men as they were, they knew the highest principle to which they could make an appeal. 4. *Their willingness to utterly abase themselves.* They are ready to atone for their sin in *kind.* They had sold Joseph for a slave, and now they offer themselves as his servants. They make the utmost humiliation.

III. The completeness of their forgiveness. Joseph assures them of his entire forgiveness. 1. *He speaks words of peace.* "Fear not." (Verses 19, 21.) He hastens, at once, to relieve their minds, before he utters one word by way of reason or explanation. They are instantly assured of that love which casteth out fear. These words were like balm to their wounds, giving them immediate relief. 2. *He will not presume to put himself judicially in the place of God.* (1.) *As an instrument of vengeance.* "Am I in the place of God?" (Verse 19.) "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." For one who himself needs forgiveness, to follow others with the last vengeance is presumption. Joseph had already judged them, and he had forgiven. He will not presume any further, and infringe the prerogatives of the Judge of all the earth. (2.) *As presuming to change God's purposes.* Joseph reminded them that God had brought good out of their evil, had turned the calamities resulting from their sinful deeds into the means of deliverance. (Verse 20.) He would not presume to change this manifest purpose of God, which facts had already revealed. "God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." (3.) *As presuming upon God's prerogative of forgiveness.* God had shown by events that He forgave their sin, and Joseph would not presume to reverse that act of forgiveness. He could not retain sins which God had remitted. 3. *He assures them that their suspicions were unfounded.* It seemed to them that with all his words of kindness and his gifts, Joseph was all along playing the hypocrite, and cherishing malignity in his heart. Therefore he shows, by implication, that their suspicions were unfounded. In verse 20 he answers them in nearly the same words as he had used seventeen years before; as if he would say, "What I told you seventeen years ago, I meant, and mean still." God's purpose of good in things evil was a principle which Joseph had well mastered. It was the golden key of his life's history; and, indeed, of all human history to those who believe that God works in it. 4. *He was ready to prove his forgiveness* *by his actions.* (Verse 21.) He would not have them be satisfied with mere words without deeds. He wished to see them happy, and he gave them the means of happiness. Joseph's forgiveness brought comfort and peace, as God's does to the sinner. And to show further how complete was his forgiveness, there was,—5. *The silent testimony of his tears.* "And Joseph wept when they spake unto him." (Verse 17.) To a pure mind, to one who sincerely means good, nothing can be more painful than suspicion. It was part of our Lord's humiliation that he had to endure the suspicion of evil. "Be ye come out, as against a *thief*, with swords and staves?" (Luke xxii. 52.) The soul that cannot be injured with the substance of evil may be pained if touched with its shadow. Jesus had to endure the gainsayings of sinners against Himself. (Heb. xii. 3.)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 14–21. The guilty conscience can never think itself safe: so many years' experience of Joseph's love could not secure his brethren of remission. Those that know they have deserved ill, are wont to misinterpret favours, and think they cannot be beloved. All that while, his goodness seemed but concealed and sleeping malice. It grieves Joseph to see their fear, and to hear them so passionately crave that which they had. "Forgive the trespass of the servants of thy father's God." What a conjuration of pardon was this! They say not, the sons of thy father; but the servants of thy father's God. How much stronger are the bonds of religion than of nature? if Joseph had been rancorous, this depreciation had charmed him; but now it resolves him into tears. They are not so ready to acknowledge their old offence as he to protest his love. Even late confession finds forgiveness. Joseph had long ago seen their sorrow; never but now heard he their humble acknowledgment. Mercy stays not for outward solemnities. How much more shall that infinite goodness pardon our sins, when He finds the truth of our repentance?—(*Bp. Hall*).

Behold we be thy servants. Oh that God might hear such words fall from us, prostrate at His feet! How soon would He take us up and embrace us! —(*Trapp*).

The spirit of Joseph's inner life was forgiveness. Conversant as his experience was with human treachery, no expressions of bitterness escape from him. No sentimental wailing over the cruelty of relations, the falseness of friendship, or the ingratitude of the world. No rancorous outburst of misanthropy, no sarcastic scepticism of man's integrity or woman's honour. He meets all bravely, with calm, meek, and dignified forbearance. If ever man had cause for such doubts, he had; yet his heart was never soured. At last; after his father's death, his brothers, apprehending his resentful recollections of their early cruelty, come to deprecate his revenge. Very touching in his reply. (Verses 19–21). This is the Christian spirit before the Christian times. The mind of Christ, the Spirit of the years yet future, blended itself with life before He came; for His words were the Eternal Verities of our humanity. In all ages love is the truth of life. Love transmutes all curses, and forces them to rain down in blessings.—(*Robertson*).

Joseph requited his enemies with a noble revenge. (Rom. xii. 20.)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 22-26.

DYING JOSEPH.

I. Satisfied with the goodness of the Lord. He had his misfortunes, his days of evil: but they were the consequences of his *integrity*, not of his sin. The "evil report" carried to his father, though prompted by a sense of duty, was the occasion of his *slavery*. His invincible purity was the cause of his imprisonment. Yet his career was, on the whole marked by success. "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man." For eighty years he lived as prime minister of Egypt, and died at the age of an hundred and ten years. "He saw Ephraim's children of the third generation: the children also of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were brought up upon Joseph's knees." He had seen the goodness of the Lord in a long life, an honoured old age, and a prosperous family. The morning of his life was clouded, but the clouds had passed away, and his evening sky is pure

II. Full of faith. He was one of those heroes of faith commended in Heb. xi. His faith made him, 1. *Sure of God's Covenant.* "God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land, unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." (Verse 24.) But, how did Joseph know that his people would ever quit Egypt? We answer, *by faith*. He trusted in God. He had in his soul the sure conviction of things not seen. Faith looks to the future, but, at the same time, gives to that future a substantial existence; so that the soul is conscious of a higher and more perfect state of things than that which surrounds it here. Joseph was sure of that covenant which promised deliverance and the possession of the good land. Faith made him, 2. *Superior to the world.* Joseph was an illustration of St. Paul's words, "We walk by faith, not by sight." His dying words show that, after all, *he was very little at home in Egypt*, though, to all outward appearance, he was one of its people. He bore an Egyptian name—a high sounding title. He married an Egyptian woman of rank. But he was still an Israelite at heart, with all the convictions, aims, and hopes of his nation. The pomp and state in which he lived afforded him no true rest for his heart and soul. Prime Minister of Egypt as he was, his last words open a window in his soul, and declare how little he belonged to that state of things in which he had been content to live. He was content to feel and know, that like his fathers, he was but a stranger and a sojourner. Dying, he said, "Carry up my bones from hence." His faith made him superior to the world in which he lived and moved. He passed the time of his sojourning there as an alien; for his true home and all his desire was the Promised Land. And faith ought to produce such effects in us. The believer is not of this world. His true home is on high. His "life is hid with Christ in God." The centre of his interest is changed from earth to heaven. His faith also made him, 3. *The possessor of immortality.* His commandment concerning his bones may have been dictated by a *natural instinct*. We cherish a feeling that, somehow, after death, our bodies still remain part of ourselves. Our ideas of existence are all associated with material substance and form. Joseph may also have been influenced by *a natural desire that his grave should not be among strangers, but among his own kindred.* When old Barzillai was offered by the king to spend the remnant of his age in the palace at Jerusalem, he said—"Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and my mother." (2 Sam. xix. 37.) But whatever other motives Joseph had, this is certain, that *he believed in God's covenant promise and claimed his share in it.* God had proclaimed Himself to the patriarchs as their God. His covenant relation to them implied a life beyond the grave. "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Men who stand so with God can never really die. The soul that has once looked up, by faith, into the face of its unseen Father, cannot be left in the grave. The patriarchs still exist. They are before God, and beneath His eye. While they were living here they may have wandered far in sin, darkness, and error. They may have served other gods, as Abraham did before he was called to the life of faith; but the one true God, who is the

Judge of all, is their God now. Joseph felt that within him which *triumphed over death.* All was failing him on earth, but his faith held on to God. When his brethren stood around his dying bed, they could not help fearing that when this powerful prince was gone, disaster must fall upon their people. But the dying man lays firm hold upon the promise, that word of God which cannot pass away. "I die," he says, but "God will surely visit you." He is not going to die. He lives on for ever to be the portion and strength of his people when their heart and flesh fail.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 22, 23. If children's children are the glory of old men, they were so in a very eminent degree to Joseph, who was assured that the blessings of Divine goodness should descend upon his head in the persons of his descendants.—(*Bush.*)

Verse 24. It is clear that when Joseph was dying, his thoughts were not engrossed by his own concerns, although he was on the borders of the everlasting world. His mind was at perfect ease concerning his own state; but he did what he could to console the hearts of his brethren, and of all his father's house, whom his death was depriving of their last earthly friend. He does not refer them to any new discoveries made to himself, but to the well-known promise made to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. When there was no written word of God, His afflicted people found a sufficient ground for their faith and hope in the sure promises handed down from father to son. How superior are our privileges, who enjoy that precious volume filled with promises as the heaven is with stars.—(*Bush.*)

That is the best thought of death, to remember the promise of God and His gracious redemption.—(*Lange*).

Verse 25. Joseph saw, by that creative faith, his family in prosperity, even in affluence; but he felt that this was not their rest. A higher life than that of affluence, a nobler destiny than that of stagnant rest, there must be for them in the future; else all the anticipations of a purer earth, and a holier world, which imagination bodied forth within his soul, were empty dreams, not the intuitions of God's Spirit. It was this idea of perfection, which was "the substance of things hoped for," that carried him far beyond the period of his own death, and made him feel himself a partaker of his nation's blessed future. They who have lived as Joseph lived, just in proportion to their purity and unselfishness, must believe in immortality. They cannot but believe it. The eternal existence is already pulsing in their veins; the life of trust and high hope, and sublime longings after perfection, with which the decay of the frame has nothing at all to do. That is gone—yes—but it was not that life in which they lived; and when it finished, what had that ruin to do with the destruction of the immortal? Heaven begun is the living proof that makes the heaven to come credible. "Christ in you" is "the hope of glory."—(*Robertson*).

Verse 26. We collect from this a hint of the resurrection of the body. The Egyptian mode of sepulture was by embalming; and the Hebrews, too, attached much importance to the body after death. Joseph commanded his countrymen to preserve his bones to take away with them. In this we detect that unmistakable human craving, not only for immortality, but immortality associated with a form. The Egyptians had a kind of feeling, that while the mummy lasted, the man had not yet perished from earth. Christianity does not disappoint, but rather meets that feeling. It grants to the materialist, by the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, that future life shall be associated with a material form. It grants to the spiritualist all he ought to wish, that the spirit shall be free from evil. For it is a mistake of ultra spiritualism to connect degradation with the thought of a risen body; or to suppose that a mind, unbound by the limitations of space, is a more spiritual idea of resurrection than the other. The opposite to spirituality is not materialism, but sin; the form of matter does not degrade.—(*Robertson*).

It all ends with the coffin, the mourning for the dead, the funeral procession, and the glance into the future life. The age of promise is over; there follows now a silent chasm of four hundred years, until out of the rushes of the Nile there is lifted up a weeping infant in a little reed-formed ark. The age of law begins, which endures for fifteen hundred years. Then in Bethlehem—Ephratah is there born another infant, and with him begins the happy time, the day of light, and quickening grace.—(*Krummacher.*)

The sacred writer here takes leave of the chosen family, and closes the Bible of the sons of Israel. It is truly a wonderful book. It lifts the veil of mystery that hangs over the present condition of the human race. It records the origin and fall of man, and thus explains the co-existence of moral evil and a moral sense, and the hereditary memory of God and judgment in the soul of man. It gradually unfolds the purpose and method of grace through a deliverer who is successively announced the seed of the woman, of Shem, of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah. So much of this plan of mercy is revealed from time to time to the human race as comports with the progress they have made in the education of the intellectual, moral, and active faculties. This only authentic epitome of primeval history is worthy of the constant study of intelligent and responsible man.—(*Murphy.*)